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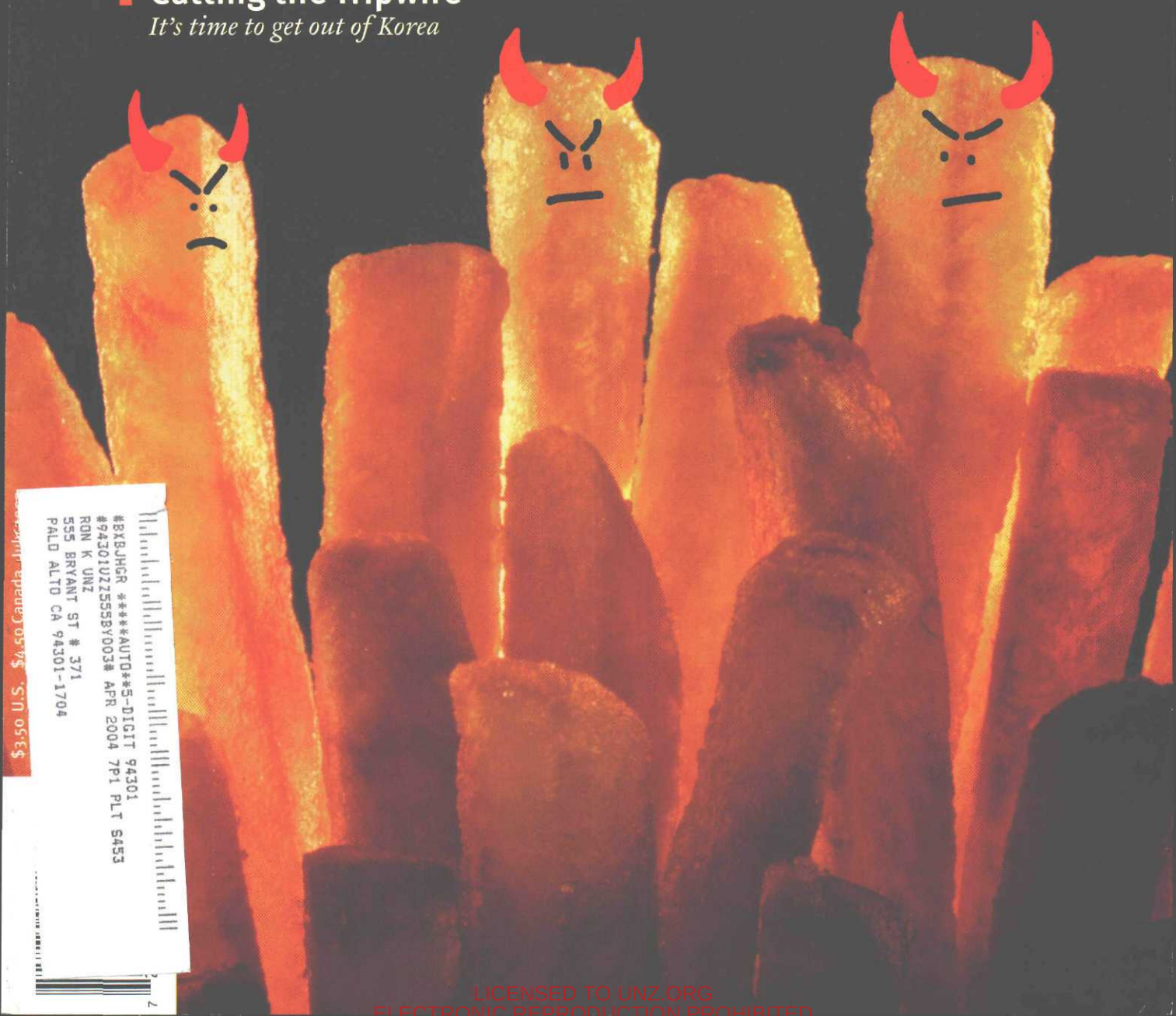
Free Minds and Free Markets

Where the Shah Went Alone
Meditations on a life under tyranny

Back to the Future
The nostalgic appeal of wizards, hobbits, and Jedi knights

Cutting the Tripwire
It's time to get out of Korea

The Anti-Pleasure Principle
The food police and the pseudoscience of self-denial



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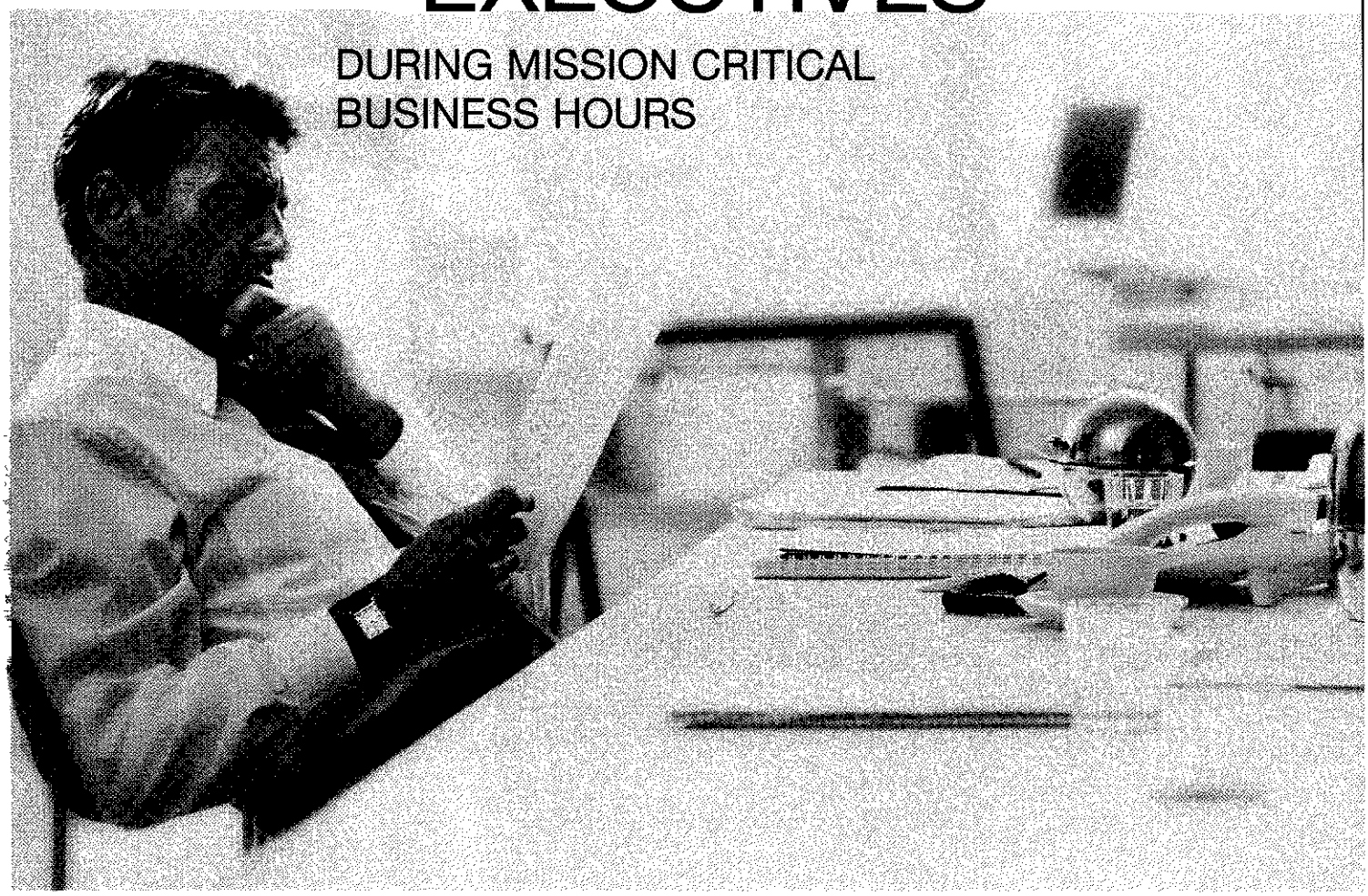

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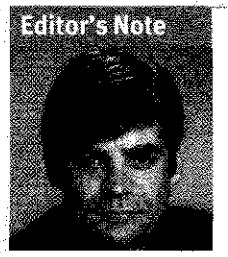

Guilty Pleasures

IN COLLEGE I had a yoga instructor named Jagdish who was, to put it euphemistically, *Buddhaesque*—he must have carried over 300 pounds on a six-foot frame. Despite his bulk, he was very supple, able to strike all the necessary postures for the benefit of the class. Though born in the U.S. (his birth name was Richard), he peppered his conversation with quasi-Eastern insights such as "There's no such thing as 'all or nothing,'" "Scratch an itch if it helps your concentration," and "Guilty pleasures are neither."

Everyone liked him, but there's no question that his weight undercut his authority. Finally, someone got up the nerve to ask the question that had silently filled the room since our first meeting: "Jagdish, why are you so fat?" Jagdish smiled broadly and repeated the question slowly and deliberately. "Why am I so fat?" he mused. "Because I eat too much."

I thought of Jagdish's weight—and wisdom—often while putting this issue together. Americans have long had an ambivalent relationship with pleasure, and we've always been quick to vilify our objects of desire. This month's cover story, "The Anti-Pleasure Principle," by Senior Editor Jacob Sullum (page 24), deconstructs the avowedly moderate image of the influential, media-savvy Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI).

That's the crew that famously dubbed fettuccine Alfredo a "heart attack on a plate" and wildly predicted gastrointestinal armageddon if the fat substitute olestra ever became popular. CSPI has, Sullum notes, "the ability to grab headlines, kill sales of products it doesn't like, and shape regulatory policy." Yet Sullum shows that CSPI, far from being a source of thoughtful, responsible research, represents yet another variation on the grand old impulse toward puritanism, aptly defined by H.L. Mencken as "the haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy."

Other stories in this issue underscore that CSPI is hardly alone in its hostility toward anything that smacks of fun. In "Birth of a Medium" (page 57), Associate Editor Jesse Walker reports on legislation aimed at adult-oriented video games such as *Grand Theft Auto III*, and in "Machine Melee" (page 64), Associate Editor Brian Doherty discusses some people's discomfort with the "violence" inherent in TV shows such as *Robot Wars* and *Battlebots*, which feature technologically advanced metal contraptions fighting to the finish.

Even the massively popular *Star Wars*, *Lord of the Rings*, and *Harry Potter* movies—whose deep appeal is elucidated by Michael Valdez Moses in "Back to the Future" (page 48)—have been cause for concern. Some years back, literary critic Harold Bloom sniffed that *Harry Potter*'s popularity merely confirmed the "dumbing down" of the American mind.

Give credit, then, to the enterprising and audacious Illinois pols described in Joe Bob Briggs' "Socialized Gambling" (page 16). After years of tightly regulating casinos, officials in the Land of Lincoln have now decided they want to own and operate them instead. As bad an idea as that is, it almost represents progress when it comes to pleasure seeking.

Nick Gillespie

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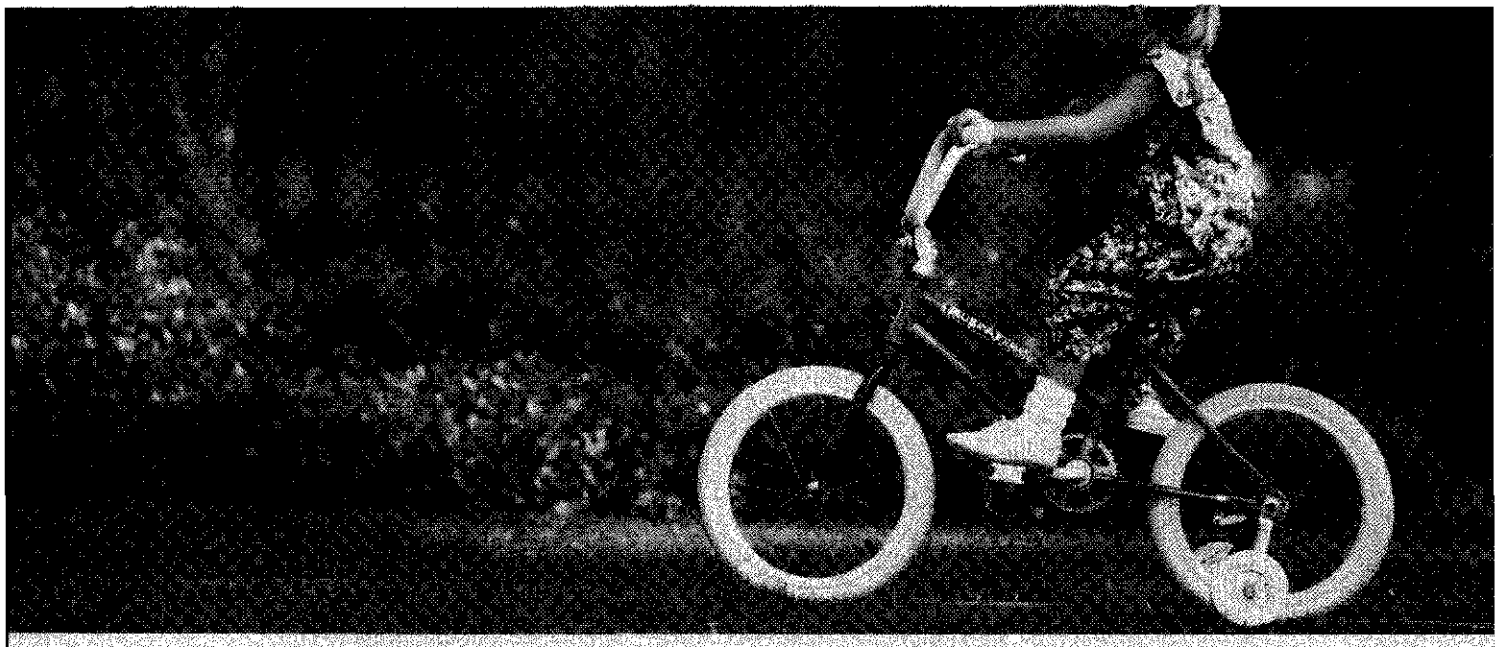

Mom and dad: She's counting on you

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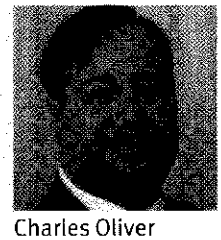

Charles Oliver

"It was utterly bizarre," says Cato Institute senior fellow DOUG BANDOW ("Cutting the Tripwire," page 34), recalling his trip 10 years ago to North Korea. "It's a Potemkin country. Roads without cars and streets without street signs." Bandow, who has previously worked as a special assistant to President Ronald Reagan and as editor of the defunct political magazine *Inquiry*, is the author of *Tripwire: Korea and U.S. Foreign Policy in a Changed World* (Cato). He's also a frequent world traveler. As this issue went to press, Bandow had just left for Kuwait to "see what's going on and what they see for the future."

Though his memories of his childhood in Iran are vivid, IRAJ ISAAC RAHMIM ("Where the Shah Went Alone," page 40) hasn't returned since he and his family came to the United States in 1978, when he was 16. "I would like to go back," he says, "if there was the sense that I wouldn't get myself thrown in jail." A resident of Houston, Rahmim has had his writing published in the *Houston Chronicle* and broadcast on Pacifica radio, and he is close to completing a book-length collection of essays. An engineer and consultant by day, he holds degrees in chemical engineering from the University of California and a doctorate in the same field from Columbia University.

Contributing Editor CHARLES OLIVER is watching the world come to him. The forces of globalization he discusses in his review of two new books on free trade ("Tear Down These Walls," page 59) have hit his home town of Dalton, Georgia, the self-proclaimed "Carpet Capital of the World." "No one seems to realize this," says Oliver, "but this county is officially 25 percent Hispanic, of which about 90 percent are from Mexico and have moved here in the last decade or so." Oliver, who has been working as a journalist for 20 years, writes a weekly education column for Dalton's *The Daily Citizen*. He has also been a staffer at *Investor's Business Daily* and **reason**. He comments on national issues via the *Shoutin' Across the Pacific* weblog (expats.blogspot.com).

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Pain and Relief

I am really disappointed that **reason** chose to publish Melinda Ammann's "The Agony and the Ecstasy" (April), an intellectually and morally challenged article on OxyContin. Please understand that I strongly favor elimination of most drug laws. I would welcome the over-the-counter sale of laudanum. I think heroin and opium should be made readily available to hospitalized patients, and that heroin in particular should be generously administered to the terminally ill. Society has little to fear from a bed-ridden, terminally ill addict.

If people choose to ingest opium, heroin, cocaine, crack, marijuana, or any of the dozens of uppers, downers, and hallucinogens in common use, let them. Put a warning label on the drugs. Sell them cheap. Take the money out of drug distribution. If some people, even millions, suffer and die, they have themselves to blame.

But so long as drugs are illegal, and so long as the vast majority of reputable, decent doctors choose to abide by the law, it seems to me to be unconscionable and unreasonable to validate or excuse the behavior of an avaricious handful who profit mightily by cheating. To portray these creeps as humanitarian heroes is just beyond the pale.

Ammann may think she understands them; she may believe their professed motives. I too think I understand them, and I think they are quacks, hacks, and lying charlatans motivated solely by greed. Lacking real evidence to the contrary (as opposed to a handful of anecdotes), **reason** should apologize to its readers.

Ed Beneville
Tustin, CA

As one of the sources for "The Agony and the Ecstacy," I wanted to thank you for a wonderful, objective article. I hope that Melinda Ammann's message reaches far and wide and finally gets our pleas for help heard by those in the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and Congress. I hope that it will help ease the concerns of the few brave doctors we have left to treat our pain.

I plan to forward Ammann's article to many of my fellow chronic pain sufferers so they may show it to their loved ones and their treating physicians to get the word out to everyone. Thank you so much for shedding some light on our fight for proper pain management and treatment. God bless you!

Tammy Alender
Hastings, MI

Thank you for the balanced reporting in "The Agony and the Ecstasy". My husband died of pancreatic cancer, a horribly painful malady. His doctors at a major teaching hospital refused to prescribe adequate pain medication because they were fearful of the DEA. Fortunately, he was ultimately able to find a doctor who was willing to prescribe OxyContin so that he could live his remaining days in comfort and coherence. The OxyContin crackdown has been a great tragedy for millions of people suffering pain.

Kathryn A. Weiner
American Academy of Pain Management
Sonora, CA

Boob Tube Power

In "Lust-See TV" (April), Nick Gillespie claims there is no relation between TV and the action of young people. I hear his argument every time I go complain to the station manager: TV can't affect behavior; it's simply entertainment.

Yet when I stop in at the station's marketing department, the story changes. There I'm assured that my TV advertising dollars will move teenage

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behavior in any direction desired.

I actively parented my five through those years and watched the impact of TV. There is no coursework in human behavior equivalent to guiding a bunch of your own. Perhaps therein lies the disconnect. America's small intelligentsia has decided they no longer want large families. How sad. There's nothing quite like reality training to improve understanding.

John Keeler
Phoenix, AZ

Comic Warrior

I would like to say how much I enjoy Peter Bagge's pieces. In fact, it was his work that inspired me to resubscribe to the magazine after a hiatus of a number of years.

I thought "Observations From a Reluctant Anti-Warrior" (March) was outstanding and paralleled my doubts about the wisdom of going into Iraq while at the same time finding myself as wary of peace activists as I am of the Bush administration. Just about all Bagge's pieces have been dead-on; they are usually the highlight of each issue. I hope you are able to retain his services for a good long time.

Robert Fisher
Corona, AZ

If Peter Bagge is so disturbed by the lack of libertarian presence at anti-war protests, why doesn't he help to organize a contingent at every one? Why not ask the local Libertarian Party to pull together its own protests? "Piggybackers" supporting every cause from animal rights to free markets to communist revolution will always be a presence at any march—indeed, any public gathering. That's not so bad; that's democracy. The solution isn't to ask them to go away (or to waste time complaining) but to raise your own voice. And if leftists are the ones with the guts and the skills to do the hard work of pulling anti-war marches together, then they should get credit for that.

Jeremy Smith
San Francisco, CA

Porous Border

Thanks to Cathy Young for "Guilty by Association" (March). There are some points she may wish to consider.

It may be correct that illegal aliens who have sneaked into our country are not terrorists but poor people looking for work—but there's no way of knowing that. The fact that the known terrorists come here legally does not preclude the possiblity (likelihood?) that others have filtered in through our porous borders. They do try to establish sleeper cells. How do we know they haven't taken advantage of our "good neighbor" border policy? If they have not, do we know they will not? What does prudence suggest?

Young implies that we must anticipate an ongoing flow of illegal aliens because of the need we have for low-paid, low-benefit workers. The money we spend trying to keep them out is wasted, and, she suggests, immigrants take jobs with working conditions so absurd that Americans refuse them. Yet it's evident that illegal aliens *are* taking jobs from American workers. American companies—Tyson Chicken for example—import illegal aliens, which keeps wages and general working conditions depressed and weakens unions. The workers are jammed into hovels and the benefits are nil.

Young, out of legitimate concern, argues that the law should change to permit workers to come into this country legally. But she misses a crucial point: It is the fact of illegality that makes the current system work. Illegal workers have to accept terribly low wages, miserable working conditions, and essentially no benefits. If they complain, it's easy to get them deported. If they became legal, they'd immediately demand higher wages, proper working conditions, and benefits. If they didn't get them, they could seek employment elsewhere. One can bet (though apparently no one knows) that the illegal aliens given amnesty in the 1980s didn't continue in their miserable jobs but moved up, making room for the next wave of their compatriots.

Finally, there is the issue of the significance of our borders. If we accept and tolerate the people who illegally swarm our country with impunity, we also accept that immigration policy is no longer in our hands. This means the nature of our society could change without discussion or debate. Perhaps one could argue that such changes are desirable, but the arguments should be made, not passively accepted as an inevitability.

Bertram H. Rothschild
Aurora, CO

reason news

With this issue, we welcome frequent contributor Michael Valdez Moses as a contributing editor. Michael's latest piece, "Back to the Future," can be found on page 48.

We're also happy to announce that Georgetown University senior Kerry Howley joined the staff in late May as this summer's Burton C. Gray Memorial Intern. Kerry will spend 10 weeks reporting from our Los Angeles offices.

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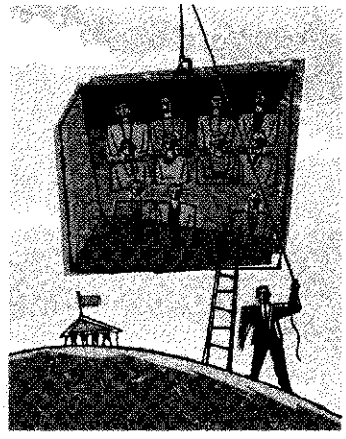
Going rate at the clink; electoral home rule; rave on; school choice update; and a secret online blacklist.

Medical pot in federal courts

Jury Ragging

Jacob Sullum

WHEN ED ROSENTHAL was convicted on federal marijuana cultivation charges last winter, his friends and supporters were not the only ones who were upset. So were the people who convicted him.



"'I'm sorry' doesn't begin to cover it," said one juror. "It's the most horrible mistake I've ever made in my entire life." The foreman said, "We as a jury truly were kept in the dark."

Jurors complained they had not been told that Rosenthal had been growing marijuana in cooperation with the city of Oakland, for patients who are allowed to use it as a medicine under California law. That information was excluded by U.S. District Judge Charles Breyer because federal law does not recognize marijuana as a medicine or allow a defense of medical necessity against drug charges. Rosenthal's conviction, which carried a five-year mandatory minimum sentence, was therefore a foregone conclusion.

Seeing the futility of defending themselves in federal court, three officers of the Los Angeles Cannabis Resource Center—Scott Imler, Jeff Yablan, and Jeffrey Farrington—have decided to plead guilty to charges of "knowingly opening and maintaining a place where [marijuana] was manufactured, distributed or used." Without a plea, the three would have faced additional charges, carrying mandatory minimum sentences of 20 years or more. They still could face prison terms. "We are hopeful that the judge will be fair when considering our actions within the totality of the situation," Imler said in a March 24 letter to supporters.

A bill introduced in April would give growers and distributors of medical marijuana an alternative to throwing themselves on the mercy of courts constrained by federal sentencing guidelines. The Truth in Trials Act—sponsored by two California congressmen, Democrat Sam Farr and Republican Dana Rohrabacher—would allow defendants in marijuana cases to present evidence that their actions were permitted under state law, in which case they could be acquitted.

"This is a matter of basic fairness," said Robert Kampia, executive director of the Marijuana Policy Project. "Jurors who could imprison someone for decades for trying to help the sick have a right to hear the whole truth, not a censored version that is stripped of any facts the government doesn't like." ▯

Going rate at the clink

Enjoy Your Stay

David Weigel

GUARDS AT THE Minneapolis Hennepin County Adult Detention Center call it "the hotel," and as hotels go, it's a bargain.

25 years ago in reason

"It's always fun to watch a sacred cow get barbecued, especially when it's the FBI....Former Acting Director L. Patrick Gray (of Watergate bum-bag fame) and two lesser panjandara are under indictment for "conspiracy to deprive Americans of their civil rights."

—Bill Birmingham, Brickbats

"The talk-to-your-plants fad is based on the claim that plants can perceive and feel emotions just like humans can. The main anchor for this fad was a 1968 report by C. Backster in the *International Journal of Parapsychology*. He stated that plants could perceive, as recorded by polygraph, the killing of brine shrimp."

—Armando Simon, "How Science Should Deal With Pseudoscience"

"Let's quit picking on commercial television's preoccupation with sex and violence....Without TV the raw sex and brute violence that fascinates those not tutored in fine artistic renditions would be obtained in bawdy songs, humor, gossip, fantasy, dime novels, and all the other means by which human beings have managed to entertain themselves before television and before the current swarm of sociologists were let loose."

—Tibor R. Machan, "Sex and Violence Revisited"

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When 68 anti-war protesters got arrested for blocking the city's U.S. courthouse on March 25, they got a bus ride and an overnight stay in Hennepin absolutely *gratis*.

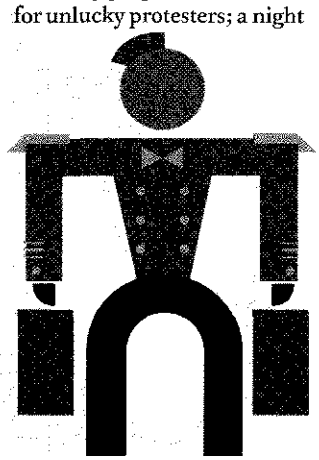
The situation did not please Gov. Tim Pawlenty. He found it "very disturbing," according to spokesmen. Three days later, the Republican governor (elected as Jesse Ventura's successor) issued a letter to the state's chief justice, asking her to make protesters pay restitution for their visits to "the hotel."

It's fair to say the letter backfired. Pawlenty's claim that "while people have the right to free speech, they do not have the right to a free arrest" filtered through the anti-war grapevine with lightning speed. Within days it was appearing in op-eds, speeches, and anti-war fundraising appeals. Michael Cavlan, one of the 68 arrested in March, said that donors to the Anti-War Committee were mentioning Pawlenty's proposal in their e-mails.

Is Pawlenty's suggestion a serious threat? Probably not. "It's never going to stand the test of appeal," says former Hennepin County District Judge J. Bruce Hartigan. The state's American Civil Liberties Union didn't bother to make a statement, and most protesters, such as Green Party chairman Cam Gordon, laughed out loud when asked about the letter.

Still, the letter has inspired some revealing insights into the high-rolling habits of the police. Pawlenty proposed a $200 fine for unlucky protesters; a night in Hennepin costs $250. That's more than twice the price of a single room at the city's four-star Whitney Hotel. *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* columnist Doug Grow, digging deeper, found that police were raking in the dough from the arrest of protesters: In a 1998 crackdown on 36 activists who'd chained themselves to trees, 600 cops consumed $7,309.90 worth of food and earned $332,488 in overtime. Three officers also received the Chief's Order of Merit for the raid, but the state didn't release the cost of their medals.

If the judges are wrong and the fee becomes reality, the Anti-War Committee vows to issue 68 challenges. It's unclear how much money the state would spend to settle all those cases, but who ever said free speech was free?



Electoral home rule

Ways to Vote

Jesse Walker

THE ADVOCATES OF electoral reform have offered many alternatives to the familiar winner-take-all system. There's *limited voting*, in which you have fewer votes than there are seats to be filled. There's *cumulative voting*, in which you cast multiple votes, choosing either to divide them among different candidates or pile them all on one name. There's the *instant runoff*, in which you rank the candidates by preference. If your first choice loses on the first count, your second choice gets your vote in the second round, and so on until a candidate has a majority.

If Assemblywoman Loni Hancock (D-Berkeley) gets her way, Golden State voters will have a chance to use any or all of those options at election time. In February, Hancock introduced AB 1039, a bill that would let California cities and counties choose which electoral system they prefer. The potential advantages range from financial savings (an instant runoff is cheaper than actually holding a second election) to more voter options (it also makes third-party candidates more viable). Furthermore, by allowing different jurisdictions to experiment with different methods, Hancock's bill avoids the straightjacket of a one-size-fits-all solution: Ideas that work can be imitated, ideas that don't can be dropped, and ideas that fare better in some contexts than others can take hold where they're appropriate.

At press time, the bill is in the early stages of the lawmaking process—it doesn't have any co-sponsors yet, and it's still several steps from getting to the floor.

Street vendor regulations

Book Bind

Jacob Sullum

JOSH WEXLER AND Anne Jordan Blanton, who hope to own a neighborhood bookstore in New Orleans one day, tried to start small by selling books from a sidewalk table. The city said they would need a permit. The city also said they could not get a permit.

New Orleans issues permits to street vendors selling food, flowers, razor blades, and pencils, but not books. And anything that's not explicitly permitted is forbidden, city officials said.

After banging their heads against the bibliophobic bureaucracy for more than a year, Wexler and Blanton challenged the city's bookselling ban in a federal lawsuit filed on April 8. A week later, U.S. District Judge Stanwood R. Duval Jr. issued a temporary restraining order allowing them to begin selling books pending final resolution of their case. Contrary to what city officials had told Wexler and Blanton, Duval said, sidewalk bookselling appears to be legal under the city's vending ordinances.

Even if it isn't, Wexler and »

Quotes

"Iraqis have really good food, they don't need a KFC."

—Stephanie Schaudel, co-coordinator for Voices in the Wilderness, on the terrors facing post-war Iraq, on CNSNews.com, April 11

"I think all these new deadly illnesses are springing up because of the way we treat the planet. Do you agree?"

—Bill O'Reilly, discussing the SARS virus on the April 1 *O'Reilly Factor*

Source

Dissent lives at the local level. Ninety-six municipalities and counties have passed resolutions against the USA PATRIOT Act, and so has the state of Hawaii. One town—Arcata, California—has gone further, with an ordinance instructing its employees to disobey federal requests that infringe constitutional rights. Local chapters of the Bill of Rights Defense Committee are organizing to push similar measures in other places; to follow their progress, go to http://www.bordc.org/index.html.

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Brickbats

Antoine Denert, mayor of the Belgian city of Kruibeke, wants people to be a little nicer to each other. "I will set an example and start in my own village by caressing, cuddling, and kissing as many people as possible," he says. Denert also has proposed replacing the Ministry of Defense with a Ministry of Tenderness.

Police are investigating Charles Young of La Porte, Texas, whose neighbors claim he has threatened local children and pets. Young is a member of the city council.

Like many Cuban Jews in south Florida, Gilbert Tabares Gomer refers to himself as a Jewban. He even put the term on his personalized license plate. Some people thought the tag was a call to ban Jews from something, so they're asking the government to ban the plate.

Burns Middle School in Brandon, Florida, suspended sixth-grader Cortez Curtis for 10 days for bringing his mother's calculator to school. The calculator violated a zero tolerance policy on weapons, because it contains a two-inch knife as well as a screwdriver.

Brian Harrell was arrested in Athens, Georgia, after police stopped him for driving with his headlights off. Harrell reportedly smelled of alcohol and had bloodshot eyes, so the police tested him for intoxication and recorded his blood alcohol level as 0.13 percent. Harrell has since resigned from his job as coordinator of a court DUI program.

The Indian state of Gujarat now requires anyone who wants to change religions to get permission from local officials. The state also has banned the use of force or bribery to convince someone to convert. Local Christians say the law is aimed at preventing them from converting Hindus.

North Korean dictator Kim Jong-il has ordered all triplets to be forcibly removed from their parents and dumped in orphanages. The government says the policy will help the poor. But Korean superstition says triplets, revered in Korea, may rise to positions of power. Kim is said to fear that a triplet might depose him, leading him to insist that they be raised somewhere where their development can be controlled.

The F-16s patrolling the skies over Washington, D.C., regularly make rapid descents to chase small planes. Unfortunately, they've been doing so without warning air traffic controllers. Making things even worse, most of the small aircraft the F-16s have been intercepting are reportedly military planes on approved flight plans, which pose no threat.

The Indiana Department of Revenue intended to send four taxpayers each one check to pay interest due from amended 1999 state income tax returns. But instead the department sent out 494 checks, totaling $73,229.76. Indiana is running an $850 million deficit.

Charles Oliver

Blanton's attorneys at the Washington, D.C.–based Institute for Justice argue that a bookselling ban violates the First Amendment. The suit also charges that the ban arbitrarily interferes with Wexler and Blanton's economic liberty. In addition to the 14th Amendment's guarantees of due process and equal protection, the suit cites the Privileges or Immunities Clause.

That constitutional provision, which prohibits states from abridging "the privileges or immunities of citizens," was eviscerated in 1873, when the U.S. Supreme Court upheld a government-enforced slaughterhouse monopoly—established, fittingly enough, by the city of New Orleans. The clause was given up for dead until a 1999 Supreme Court decision that relied on it to overturn California's restrictions on welfare benefits for new residents. Although the issue in that case (the right to travel) was far afield from bookselling, the Institute for Justice hopes the clause can be revived as a protection for entrepreneurs of all kinds facing anti-competitive regulations.

"Hundreds of cities limit street vending of books and other goods in all kinds of irrational ways—allowing some businesses and arbitrarily excluding other perfectly harmless ones," says Institute for Justice attorney Dana Berliner. "Rather than focusing on simple vending rules to protect health, safety, and traffic flow, most cities impose whatever limits and costs happen to strike official fancy."

Berliner notes that puzzling entry barriers are by no means limited to street vendors; licensing requirements apply to more than 500 occupations in the United States. "For many of these occupations, from shorthand court reporter to fence installer," she says, "the rationale for licensing is nonexistent."

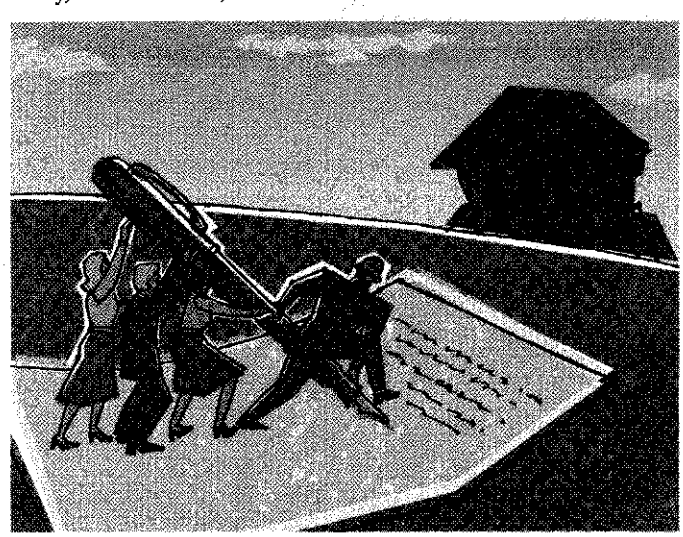
How a bad bill becomes a law

Rave On

Sara Rimensnyder

THE RECENT PASSAGE of the RAVE act, which allows the government to hold event organizers responsible for customers' drug use, should infuriate even those who'd run screaming from one of these all-night, electronic-music-fueled dance parties.

Why? The RAVE Act, now officially known as the Illicit Drug Anti-Proliferation Act, passed both the House and Senate in April without ever having gone through committee and without floor debate. Sen. Joseph R. Biden (D–Del.) tacked his legislation onto the Amber Alert bill, a measure intended to help capture kidnappers, for no reason except political expediency. He had learned from his experience last session, when vocal, organized opposition from groups like the Drug Policy Alliance (DPA) stopped the bill in its tracks.



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Balance Sheet

Jeff A. Taylor

Fleece-Rate

Congress finally investigates the E-Rate program, a plan to give schools and libraries subsidized Net access. At least $200 million of the $2.25 billion spent by the program is thought to have been ripped off or otherwise misspent.

Being Tax-Averse

Actor John Malkovich bolts France after authorities insist the American pay the full 65 percent French tax on his income despite also paying tax to the IRS. "They interpret things one way, I interpret them another," Malkovich tells the *New York Daily News*.

Less Wild West

New Mexico becomes the 34th state to adopt concealed-carry legislation. Residents over 25 can be licensed to carry firearms provided they pass a criminal background check and a gun training course.

Spam Lite

A Maryland state judge refuses a spammer's request to force the removal of his contact info from an anti-spam site. Francis Uy posted the address and phone number of George Alan Moore Jr., on his "Maryland's most wanted spammers" site. The court ruled that Uy merely posted accurate data.

Energy Contract

Fed up with the University of California's lax management, the Department of Energy vows to put oversight of the Los Alamos National Laboratory up for a competitive contract. It would be the first time the nuclear weapons lab has been opened up to competitive bids.

Sex Sells

A Melbourne brothel known as The Daily Planet debuts on the Australian Stock Exchange—and finds its share price quickly doubled. No word on what Lois Lane thinks—or that stuffy Clark Kent.

Country Life

Farm-state senators back a new "Homestead Act" to subsidize rural communities. Student loans and tax credits would be among the goodies doled out to residents, who already see subsidies on everything from telecom to air travel, not to mention billions in farm aid.

Forbidden Lore?

A federal judge bans the distribution of anti-tax nut Irwin Schiff's book that argues Americans don't have to pay income tax. The court can punish Schiff for failure to pay taxes, but censorship of even "false and frivolous" material sets a bad precedent.

Super DMCA

Not content with the Digital Millennium Copyright Act at the federal level, Hollywood lobbyists drop down to the states to cook up even more stringent restrictions on the use of technology. Legislation has passed in six states and is pending in others that would, in some cases, ban the home use of network routers because they can prevent Net providers from checking for copyrighted material.

Dead Letter

FBI concerns about the accuracy of testimony in the Timothy McVeigh case somehow never made it to Attorney General John Ashcroft or to McVeigh's lawyers. FBI lawyers concluded that testimony from a Bureau bomb-expert was "false, misleading, and potentially fabricated."

Bad Faith

An aide to the governor of Idaho talks trash about the Free State Project, saying it would be a state living "under the threat of drunk drivers, drug addicts, or criminals." The project aims to get 20,000 fans of freedom to move to single state where they can make a difference at the ballot box.

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Data

The Spoils of War

Sara Rimensnyder

In April, President George W. Bush signed off on nearly $80 billion in emergency spending to pay for the war on Iraq. With that much money in play, the White House and Congress couldn't help but throw in a few extra goodies that had nothing to do with Iraq. Take, for example, the $93 million marked under three separate expenditures for counter-narcotics initiatives led by the Defense and State Departments.

According to David Williams, vice president of policy at Citizens Against Government Waste, there was only one copy of the conference report—the final compromise between the House and Senate versions of a bill—available to Congress prior to the vote. "We're concerned that there wasn't enough scrutiny of the report before it was voted on," he says.

Sample Expenses in the Emergency Wartime Supplemental Appropriations Act

$2.9 billion	to bail out failing airlines
$110 million	for the National Animal Disease Center in Ames, Iowa
$65 million	for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration for geostationary and polar orbiting systems
$16 million	to study severe acute respiratory syndrome, or SARS
$15 million	for the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
$4.8 million	for the General Accounting Office
$3.3 million	for "payment to the European Communities" with regard to the "music licensing dispute"
$2 million	for the United States Fish and Wildlife Service's State and Tribal Wildlife Grants
$1 million	for Training and Employment Services at the Department of Labor
$231,000	for abstinence education and related services for a Lutheran ministry in Allentown, Pennsylvania

Sources: Emergency Wartime Supplemental Appropriations Act (H.R. 1559) and Citizens Against Government Waste (www.cagw.org)

Department of Defense

› "One senator's pet issue made a mockery of the Democratic [sic] process—becoming law without any public hearing or opportunity for input whatsoever," DPA Executive Director Ethan Nadelmann wrote in an e-mail after the act had passed. "We will be working with the legislators who opposed this provision—such as Senators Durbin, Kennedy and Leahy and Representatives Conyers and Scott—for its repeal."

On the bright side, lines from the original bill suggesting that prosecutors should use the sale of glowsticks, massage oil, and water as evidence of drug use were stricken from the version that passed. So was use of the word *rave*. Though the DPA celebrated the removal of "such blatant discrimination," the move also could stoke concerns that the measure could be used to target an ever-widening assortment of events.

The impact of the new law will largely depend on how John Ashcroft's Justice Department decides to enforce it. If the department's aggressive assault on medical marijuana in California is any indication, the next few years could be a dangerous time to be in the business of helping people dance the night away.

School choice update

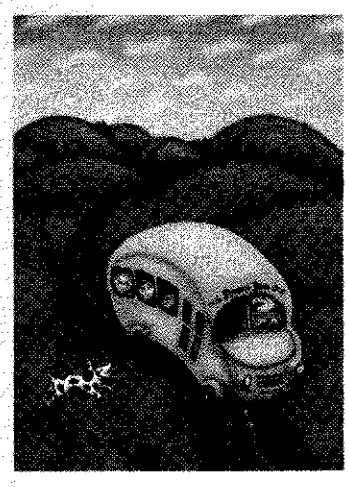
Tough Sell

Lisa Snell

AT THE REQUEST of 50 desperate parents in Compton, California Assemblyman Ray Haynes (R-66th District) has introduced a limited school-choice bill. Any child within the Compton school district eligible for the free lunch program—that is, 99.9 percent of students—would be able to participate. Participating private schools would be required to use standardized tests to evaluate student performance.

If there was ever a district that needed change, it's Compton. The school system is notorious for its financial and academic bankruptcy. In 1993, the district had a $20 million budget shortfall that led to a 10-year takeover by the California Department of Education. But the state did little better by Compton kids, going through five different superintendents and eventually returning some financial control to the district, without ever improving academic performance. In the last two years some Compton schools have made modest gains, but more than 75 percent were still rated "well below average" in overall test-score performance.

Nevertheless, Haynes' bill faces stiff opposition from teachers unions, People for the American Way, Compton Superintendent Jesse Gonzales, and Mervyn Dymally, the Democratic assemblyman who represents Compton, along with most other Democratic legislators. Haynes, whose district is in Orange County, told the *Los Angeles Times* that it would be very difficult to push the bill through the legislature and to get Gov. Davis' signature. He plans to wait until the 2004–05 session for an actual



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vote, to allow time to build more support. According to the *Times*, he told the Compton parents that they'd need to build their group of 50 out to "something more like 10,000" for the bill to succeed.

In other voucher news, the Colorado state senate passed a pilot bill that, when signed, will mark the first voucher plan enacted since the U.S. Supreme Court's landmark school-choice decision last year. (The Supremes upheld a voucher program in Cleveland that allowed students to use state funds for both private and parochial schools.) The Colorado plan is limited to struggling, low-income students in low-achieving school districts. Texas is vying to be the third state (after Florida and potentially Colorado) to offer a statewide voucher program. Under the Lone Star plan, vouchers would initially be available only to low-income students in 11 urban districts.

A secret online blacklist

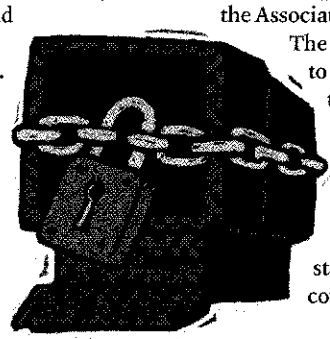
The Big Block

Jesse Walker

LAST YEAR Pennsylvania passed a bill to crack down on child pornography online. The cause was uncontroversial, but the law's approach—requiring Internet Service Providers to block Web sites based on their Internet Protocol addresses—drew immediate criticism from the technology community. "Child pornography is abhorrent," says Alan Davidson, associate director of the Center for Democracy and Technology (CDT). "But this approach, because of the architecture of the Internet, inevitably blocks innocent Web sites as well as targeted Web sites. It's like prohibiting mail delivery to an entire apartment building just because one tenant is suspected of wrongdoing."

A study by Benjamin Edelman, a student at Harvard Law School, buttresses the point. "More than 87% of active domain names are found to share their IP addresses (i.e. their web servers) with one or more additional domains, and more than two third of active domain names share their addresses with fifty or more additional domains," he reported in a March 2003 paper for Harvard's Berkman Center. "With so many sites sharing IP addresses," he continues, approaches like Pennsylvania's "are bound to produce 'overblocking'—accidental and often unanticipated denial of access to web sites that abide by the stated filtering rules."

There's a difference, alas, between demonstrating this in theory and demonstrating it in Pennsylvania's particular context. Earlier this year the CDT requested a list of the blocked sites, so it could see how many non-porn pages had been swept up in the virtual dragnet. The state attorney general, Mike Fisher, refused to release the information, arguing that disclosing the sites' addresses would itself amount to distribution of child pornography. "We will not aid and abet child pornographers by publicizing their illegal Web sites," Fisher's spokesman told the Associated Press.



The CDT still hopes to convince Fisher to release the information. If it fails to persuade him, though, it may challenge the state's position in court.

Horrors Told

Sara Rimensnyder

Anne Applebaum

The cruel system of Soviet work camps known as the gulag terrorized some 18 million prisoners—and yet its history has been relatively overlooked in the catalog of 20th-century horrors. That's why *Washington Post* editorialist Anne Applebaum devoted the last six years to writing the fascinating, horrifying *Gulag: A History* (Doubleday).

Applebaum spent much of the late 1980s and early '90s in Eastern Europe, covering the region for *The Economist* and other publications. "I met lots of [gulag] survivors," she says. "Coming back to the West, I realized nobody here knew anything about it." After failing to find someone who would write a history, she decided to do it herself, making broad use of extensive archives released by Moscow after the fall of the Soviet Union.

Assistant Editor Sara Rimensnyder spoke to Applebaum by phone in May.

Q: What was the most horrifying aspect of the gulag?

A: Everybody will have some anecdote or incident that resonates with them; it's very personal. In my case, since I wrote the book at the same time that I had two children, the stories of children born in the camp or taken away from their parents were the worst.

Q: What was the most unexpected thing you discovered?

A: The degree to which it was perfectly well known at the highest echelons of the Soviet bureaucracy how horrible conditions were, in great detail. And yet nothing was done.

Q: What is the most important lesson to be learned from a study of the gulag?

A: When people write books about terrible tragedies of the past, they often say they're doing it so it will never happen again. While reading the history of the gulag and the way the Soviets spread it to other countries, I thought, "I'm not writing this so it won't happen again; I'm writing because it will." The alacrity with which other countries took up the idea is remarkable.

The lesson is that this kind of system has been built many times and will be built many more times. I am the last person who would claim the gulag was unique. The mistreatment of other human beings, and especially one's enemies, goes on and will continue to go on. We need to try much harder to understand what it is that persuades people to do it.

Q: Is bureaucracy to blame?

A: It's not just bureaucracy; it's ideology. A lot of people believed in what they were doing. They believed these were enemies of the people and could be treated like building materials, like units of labor. And could be worked to death if necessary.

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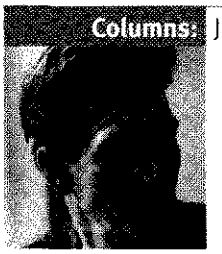

Columns: Joe Bob Briggs

Socialized Gambling

Illinois pols want to muscle in on casinos.

CHICAGO MAYOR RICHARD Daley is talking about launching a new lakefront casino, to be owned by the city. Meanwhile, Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich is talking about seizing all existing casino licenses and having the government run the gambling joints. Blagojevich is a reasonable man. If he's foiled in his effort to create his own chain of casinos overnight by seizing the assets of seven companies, he says he'll settle for a 70 percent tax on the casinos' gross.

The rallying cry of politicians statewide is "Tax 'Em, Hammer 'Em, Regulate 'Em, and Seize 'Em. The New Deal lives!" The targets include big publicly traded corporations: Harrah's, Argosy, Penn National—the kind of solid employers most communities would kill to have in their midst. In some parts of the country companies this large are given moratoriums on taxes just for showing up. But things are different in Illinois. Mayor Daley recently told the *Chicago Sun-Times,* "The taxpayers of Illinois should own every gambling license right now. They should own it all and get all the profit. Hire someone to manage it. Instead of giving the profit to the private sector, the state should take it. Simple as that. Very simple."

Not so simple. For one thing, how would a government-owned casino deal with the age-old problem of table-game volatility? There are days, weeks, and even months when certain games lose money. If the state becomes reliant on gambling for revenue, does it announce that garbage collection will be suspended because a Hong Kong high roller won $3.6 million at the baccarat table? Does it tighten the slots every time it needs to build a new school? The competing casinos in northwest Indiana would love it, of course, because they could easily beat the odds, ride out the highs and lows, and drain off all the gamblers. Illinois would be left with the equivalent of the old sawdust joints on the Nevada-California state line, where only degenerates stopped to play.

And are Illinois politicians unfamiliar with the concept of the excise tax, the institution that distinguishes a capitalist country from a socialist one? Socialist countries want to *own* industries. Capitalists just tax them. If the government is going to take over casinos, then why not, say, amusement parks or, for that matter, Baskin-Robbins franchises?

I don't know exactly what's happened in the last decade to make the Illinois casino companies so unpopular, because in many respects they've been poster boys for exactly what riverboat casinos were set up to do. In Joliet the two casinos, Harrah's and Empress, have turned a crime-ridden, grimly depressed, deteriorating city known only for its state prison into a prosperous little suburban community with clean new streets and continually rising real estate values. In Aurora the Hollywood Casino has turned the Paramount Theater across the street into a major performing arts destination and redeemed the city center. Everywhere you find them, the casinos support hospitals, Little League baseball teams, high school band trips. And a casino operation is so labor-intensive that it also tends to be the biggest employer in town.

Still, Illinois hasn't been treating casinos like welcome benefactors. There were always strange rules and high taxes there compared to the rest of the country.

In Mississippi the philosophy was to tax low and let the market determine the number of casinos. That state ended up with a very prosperous business based on a Nevada model. Illinois, on the other hand, started out with a 35 percent

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Who is Ernest Hancock?

* Father and Husband
* Freedom Fighter
* Hard-Core Libertarian
* Business Owner
* Government Watchdog
* Political and Media Insultant

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tax, the highest in the nation, and set the exact number of licenses. It then created an approval process so byzantine that it took companies years and hundreds of millions of dollars to pass muster just for the license, before they had spent the first dollar on construction.

Illinois also wrote into law all kinds of hindrances to the casino operator in order to create "limited gambling." You can have only 1,200 gaming positions per casino, for example. (In other states, 2,000 positions would be considered a small operation.) Until last year, your riverboat had to leave the dock and actually cruise—a major annoyance to customers who had to wait for the boat to return. Until very recently, the casino had to be an actual boat, not a barge, even if it never left the dock, making for cramped conditions.

All of these things are a pain to the operator, but they don't really limit gambling. The simplest way to limit gambling would have been to ban slot machines and allow table games only. But Illinois seems to love slot machines—so much so that various civic leaders have proposed putting them in O'Hare Airport. That would be pretty much a commitment to wide open gambling, in a public access sense. No one has to drive to the riverboat, but everyone has to walk through the airport.

Throughout its 10-year experiment in gambling, Illinois assessed the highest casino taxes in the country—its original 35 percent rate compares with 6 percent in Nevada, 9 percent in Atlantic City, and around 20 percent in most other riverboat states. But that wasn't good enough. Last year the Illinois legislature raised the casino tax from 35 percent to 50 percent, pretty much slamming the door on any new development projects. (This tax, by the way, is on the gross, not on profits, and is in addition to a $3 "boarding fee" charged every time someone walks through the turnstiles.)

Despite making for a $2 billion market, the gambling boats in Illinois don't compare favorably to those in other states. They're crowded (because of the gaming positions limit); most of them don't have any entertainment or hotels (if they do have hotels, they're tiny); and the high taxes mean you don't get as much for your money if you gamble there. The only thing they have is easy access from major urban areas where people will put up with a certain level of hassle to be able to gamble at all.

> If the state becomes reliant on gambling for revenue, does it announce that garbage collection will be suspended because a high roller won $3.6 million at the baccarat table?

The most desirable market is, of course, Chicago, which is why the most profitable casinos are scattered in neighboring suburbs such as Aurora, Elgin, and Joliet. There's one other license, originally assigned to Rosemont, which has been tied up in regulatory proceedings for years now. Its holders have been deemed unfit by the gaming commission (based on alleged Mob ties), but they've been given a chance to sell it. A year ago MGM Mirage, the largest casino company in the world, offered to pay $615 million for the license, but that offer was quickly withdrawn when the state tax rate went to 50 percent.

Now the situation is even worse for the suburban casinos. With Daley talking about a Chicago casino, with the horse racing tracks trying to get slot machines in Cook County, with the legislature disinclined to increase gaming position limits or lower taxes, the economics of the business could collapse. Because Illinois is constantly changing the rules, major investment plans have already stopped.

The political resentment of casinos for making money in Illinois is strange. Rich corporations used to be exactly what a city or state wanted. No one gets outraged in Washington state if Microsoft has a record year. Michigan doesn't get crotchety if Ford makes billions. It's only in Illinois that you have this profit envy even though the system is set up so that the more money casinos make, the healthier the city, county, and state budgets.

What comes next for gambling in Illinois could be anything from years of litigation—by casino companies who believed they were buying a valuable license that turned out to be worthless—to some kind of cobbled-together compromise between the state, the city, the casinos, the horse racing tracks, and the cities in the rest of the state that feel they've been left out of the gambling boom and now want part of the action.

One interest group never represented in any meeting is the gambler himself. All he's expected to do is pony up. ▪

Joe Bob Briggs (www.joebobbriggs.com) is a columnist for UPI and the author of Profoundly Disturbing: The Shocking Movies that Changed Cinema (Universe).

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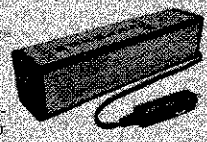

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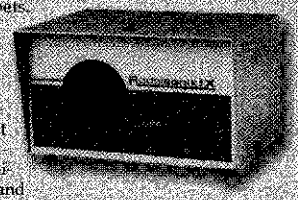

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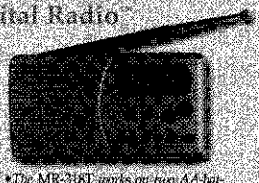

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Media Critic, Critique Thyself

Eric Alterman's *What Liberal Media?* is as shoddy as the books it attacks.

FOR MOST CONSERVATIVES, liberal media bias is a self-evident truth. For most on the left, it's a right-wing Big Lie. Last year, two bestsellers made the conservative case: Bernard Goldberg's *Bias* and Ann Coulter's *Slander*. (Much more solid—and much less hyped—was William McGowan's 2001 book *Coloring the News*.) Now comes the counterpunch from the left: *What Liberal Media?*, by Eric Alterman, who claims the media today are really slanted in favor of the right, partly because they've been cowed by complaints of left-wing bias.

The "so-called liberal media," to use Alterman's phrase, have greeted the book warmly: The *Los Angeles Times*' reviewer called it "a well-documented, even-tempered and witty answer, I might say antidote, to such toxic recent bestsellers" as *Bias* and *Slander*. No less predictably, conservatives have dismissed *What Liberal Media?* as a ludicrous attempt to deny the obvious. As Bill O'Reilly put it to Alterman on *The O'Reilly Factor*, "You're living in the land of Oz."

Full disclosure: I've crossed swords with Alterman myself. In a 2002 column for MSNBC.com, Alterman included me in a list of "reflexively" pro-Israel pundits, even though I had never written about the Middle East. After I responded in my *Boston Globe* column, Alterman claimed that the listing was "based on [his] overall impression of [my] columns" and was, in any case, supposedly vindicated ex post facto by the views expressed in my response. Later, he grudgingly apologized.

Many reviewers have congratulated Alterman on his voluminous endnotes. So has Alterman himself: "For you Goldberg/Coulter fans, those little numbers are called 'footnotes,'" he sneered in an exchange on *National Review Online*. "They allow other people to check your work."

True enough. Let's do some checking.

Alterman writes that, to accuse the media of hyping racism, "McGowan took refuge in a *New Yorker* report by Michael Kelly that argued that the church burnings in the U.S. South in 1996 were not racially motivated. In fact, a *Columbia Journalism Review* editor dissected and discredited this report of Kelly's, which McGowan ignored." The endnote oh-so-conscientiously provides the URL for the *Columbia Journalism Review* story. But the lengthy article, a survey of Kelly's career as he was appointed editor of *The New Republic*, devoted only two short paragraphs to the *New Yorker* church burning story. Kelly's piece was criticized for a possibly unfair jab at President Clinton but described as "otherwise strong." Meanwhile, a look at *Coloring the News* shows that the *New Yorker* article is only one of five sources cited by McGowan.

As "the best illustration of the power of the far right to draw the mainstream into its web of lies," Alterman cites the purported savaging of David Brock, a conservative attack dog turned penitent liberal, after the publication of his memoir *Blinded by the Right: The Conscience of an Ex-Conservative*. "The attack on Brock," he writes, "was picked up by...Timothy Noah in the allegedly liberal *Slate*, who first called the apostate conservative a liar on the basis of having read a CNN transcript." Alterman claims that when the transcript proved to be wrong—Brock was accused of falsely claiming that he had never appeared on Fox News to discuss his book, but he had actually said "Fox prime time"—Noah "scored Brock instead for telling the truth 'not very loudly.'"

Actually, Noah "scored" Brock for muddying the question of whether he had been on Fox (see slate.msn.com/id/2064849). More

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important, he never called Brock *anything* on the basis of the CNN transcript. His column "David Brock, Liar" (slate.msn.com/id/2063759) predated the CNN show; it dealt with likely falsehoods in Brock's book and an outright lie in a letter to *The Washington Post*.

Fact checking aside, what about the big picture? Alterman's argument goes something like this: Most "establishment" journalists aren't as liberal as they're made out to be, and anyway it doesn't matter because they bend over backward to be fair, and anyway it's the owners who call the shots. (On the last topic, his faith is unshaken by his subsequent discussion of the dissonance between *The Wall Street Journal*'s conservative editorial page and its news section.)

Alterman acknowledges that "the vast majority [of elite journalists] are pro-choice, pro-gun control, pro-separation of church and state, pro-feminism, pro-affirmative action, and supportive of gay rights," and that coverage of these issues tends to reflect these views. While Alterman contends that the media lean right on economic issues such as free trade, his chapter on the subject makes no mention of tax cuts, privatization, or regulation.

Alterman is clearly right when he says that the "liberal media" are not nearly as self-consciously ideological as, say, *National Review* or Fox News, and that liberal journalists are far more likely to see themselves as neutral observers rather than as political players. Yet this hardly disproves the key contention of *Bias*: that many journalists who consider themselves neutral are blithely unaware of their own biases.

And even here, Alterman's account is heavily skewed. *The New Republic* is treated as not-really-liberal because of its hawkish foreign policy, despite its fairly consistent liberalism on economic issues and its Democratic partisanship. Meanwhile, Bill O'Reilly is treated as an undiluted right-winger despite his support for abortion rights, gun control, and environmental regulations. *Salon* is credited with ideological openness because it publishes some conservatives; Fox News gets no such credit for featuring liberal and leftist commentators.

Rattling off the names of some 25 right-wing television pundits, Alterman rhetorically inquires, "Who among the liberals can be counted upon to be as ideological, as relentless, and as nakedly partisan as George Will, Bob Novak, Pat Buchanan...?" Let's see: Democratic hatchet man James Carville, perhaps? CNN leftist Julianne Malveaux?

Though billed as a rebuttal to conservative anti-media broadsides, *What Liberal Media?* offers little direct response to the "toxic recent bestsellers." Alterman takes a few jabs at misstatements in *Bias* and *Slander*, mostly citing other people's already published critiques. His analysis of *Coloring the News* is almost entirely a rehash of a negative review in *The Washington Monthly*.

This is not to say the conservative critiques aren't seriously flawed. Goldberg's valid arguments—e.g., that the media sometimes sacrifice facts to political correctness in covering homelessness and similar issues—are marred by overwrought rhetoric and rancor over his break with CBS. Coulter is basically the right's (much slimmer) Michael Moore. Even McGowan is not above fudging the context of some quotes.

To some extent, of course, bias *is* in the eye of the beholder. We are more likely to notice things that irk us; thus, Alterman is exercised over the rough treatment of Al Gore during the 2000 campaign but oblivious to the rough treatment of Newt Gingrich after the Republican takeover of the House. Alterman expresses dismay that Coulter and Rush Limbaugh get away with venomous remarks about liberals, while Goldberg cites some pretty venomous remarks Nina Totenberg and other liberals have made about conservatives.

Right-wing diatribes against the "liberal media" often have an unpleasant whiff of whining. In this respect, Alterman isn't all that different from his targets. At one point he notes that he "earned a grand total of about $500 working as a liberal journalist" between 1982 and 1984, while the young and then-conservative David Brock had access to a well-funded right-wing support network. (Alas, poor Eric: He had to make do with a Carnegie Endowment internship and a fellowship at the World Policy Institute.) Alterman gleefully cites William Kristol's admission that liberal media bias "was often used as an excuse by conservatives for conservative failures." Then he proceeds to blame right-wing influence over the media for the Clinton impeachment, the outcome of the 2000 elections (including the Florida fiasco), and the Democrats' poor performance in 2002.

Media critic, critique thyself. ■

Contributing Editor Cathy Young (cathyyoung2@cs.com) is a columnist for The Boston Globe.

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Low Budget

Feeling blue and seeing red over a free-spending administration

If Mitch Daniels, recently departed director of the Office of Management and Budget and the putative fiscal conservative on President Bush's economic team, succeeds in his ambition to become governor of Indiana, grateful Hoosiers might want to send thanks to the people who made it all possible—the taxpayers of New Jersey.

No, New Jerseyans haven't been canvassing Muncie on Daniels' behalf. They've shown their support with Yankee greenbacks. If not for the Garden State's winning combination of generous giving to and modest expectations from Washington, D.C., Daniels couldn't have enjoyed his brief, troubled tenure in the nation's capital.

New Jersey, as fans of the Tax Foundation's annual report "Federal Tax Burdens and Expenditures by State" know, is the nation's most charitable donor. The report details federal taxes paid by each individual state, weighing that against the amount of money each state gets back—in procurements, salaries, services, and walking around money—from Washington. For every buck New Jersey throws into Uncle Sam's hat, it gets back a mere 67 cents. If that makes the Garden State a loser in the tax-and-spend sweepstakes, it's good news for New Mexico, which takes in $2.08 for every dollar it pays, making it the overall winner. Of course, in an empire, all roads lead to Rome: The District of Columbia outdoes all the states, paying itself a whopping $5.73 on the dollar.

How does Daniels figure in? By helping to up federal spending more than 30 percent in the first two years of the Bush administration. The war on terrorism had something to do with this increase, but it doesn't account for all of it. According to the Heritage Foundation, Bush's first two budgets took nondefense discretionary spending from $320 billion to $421 billion—$22 billion of that in the form of pure pork attachments to spending bills. Who can forget 2002's farm bill, which will raise and disburse $180 billion over 10 years?

Nor has war-related spending been fully war-related on Daniels' watch. To give just one example: $117 million from this spring's $80 billion emergency spending package for the war on Iraq went to help the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration build the Polar-Orbiting Operational Environmental Satellite System. Indiana voters might even want to grill their gubernatorial hopeful on why he didn't do more for them during his D.C. tenure. According to the Tax Foundation, the Crossroads of America doesn't break even in federal spending, getting back just 99 cents on the dollar.

It's hard not to notice how closely the Tax Foundation's map of tax-and-spend losers and winners tracks the celebrated map of "blue" and "red" America—which shows, on a county by county basis, the voting for, respectively, candidates Gore and Bush in 2000. I am not claiming President Bush is rewarding his own voters (an implausible claim, since the patterns of federal receipts and largess have been established for decades). If anything, the preponderance of blue in coastal areas, along the Mississippi, and on stretches of the Ohio River leads me to suspect the real division in America is that Bush voters don't like water. Nor am I a supporter of the Democratic Party; in fact, I'd gladly make Bush President-for-Life in gratitude for that $300 check he sent me a few years back. But I am a lifelong blue stater (and a born-and-bred New Jerseyan), and I can't help fuming that heartland Americans—everywhere praised for their rural common sense, strong work ethic, and skepticism of big government—are picking my pocket.

Having compared states, parties, and regions, let me now compare decades. The 1990s saw a vast creation of wealth in the United States, some of it chimerical, but most of it real, and almost all of it centered in urban areas. What we're seeing in the '00s is a garden-variety spending spree. But it's also a Mugabe-esque redistribution of wealth, from hard-working achievers to underperforming layabouts. And this time, it's coming to you courtesy of the party of fiscal responsibility. ■

Tim Cavanaugh (tcavanaugh@reason.com) is **reason***'s Web editor.*

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"What We Believe"

(This Month, Anyway)

PETER BAGGE@EARTHLINK.NET

AMERICANS ARE ISOLATIONISTS BY NATURE, AND AS SUCH WE'RE VERY RELUCTANT TO GO TO WAR...
THE ONLY REASON WE DO GO TO WAR LIKE CLOCKWORK EVERY FEW YEARS IS BECAUSE WE'RE FORCED TO!
HERE HERE!
I AGREE!
PUNDIT #1
PUNDIT #2
PUNDI
THE EVIDENCE WAS OVERWHELMING THAT IRAQ WAS HARBORING AL-QAEDA TERRORISTS AND WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION...
SO WE HAD TO WAGE WAR ON THEM IN ORDER TO FIND THE EVIDENCE!
RIGHT?
IT'S OUR DUTY TO INTRODUCE DEMOCRACY TO THE PEOPLE OF THE MIDDLE EAST...
THEN WE'LL JUST HAVE TO RE-INTRODUCE IT TO 'EM...
BUT WHAT IF THEY VOTE FOR A FASCIST DICTATOR OR AN ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALIST?
...AND KEEP ON INTRODUCING IT UNTIL THEY GET IT RIGHT!
NOT ALL OF EUROPE OPPOSED THE IRAQ WAR. SPAIN, BRITAIN AND ITALY ALL SUPPORTED US...
YEAH, WELL, WHAT DO YOU EXPECT FROM A BUNCH OF SISSY EUROPEANS?
BUT THE PUBLICS IN THOSE COUNTRIES WERE OVERWHELMINGLY AGAINST IT...
IT WAS VITAL TO THE SAFETY OF OUR TROOPS THAT WE STIFLED ALL CRITICISM OF THE WAR...
WHY, IF ONE OF OUR SOLDIERS HAD STOPPED TO QUESTION WHAT HE'S DOING IN IRAQ HE MIGHT'VE GOTTEN SHOT BY AN IRAQI!
THIS IS THE HOME OF THE BRAVE! WE AMERICANS AREN'T AFRAID OF ANYTHING!
EXCEPT FOR SECOND-HAND SMOKE, SATAN WORSHIPERS AND ALIEN ABDUCTIONS, THAT IS.
P.BAGGE '03

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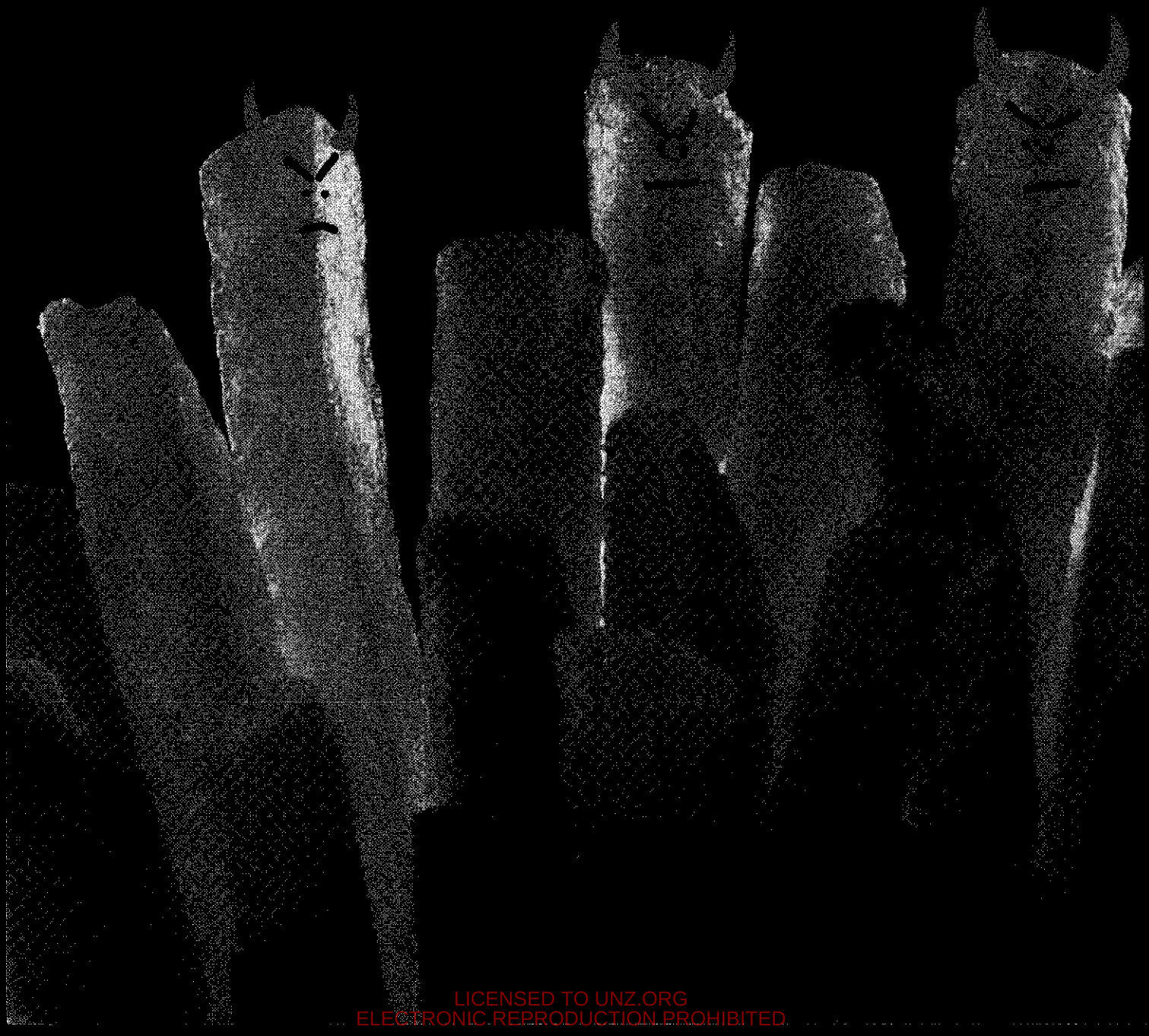

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The Anti-Pleasure Principle

The "food police" and the pseudoscience of self-denial

Jacob Sullum

In the Northeast they call it "soda." In the Midwest they call it "pop." In the South they call it "coke." At the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI), they call it "liquid candy"—and they don't mean that as a compliment. CSPI Executive Director Michael Jacobson counts more than half a dozen ways in which soda is bad for you:

It makes you fat (although Jacobson concedes "it has not been possible to prove that [soda] is responsible for the excess calories that lead to obesity"); it causes osteoporosis (because "people who drink soft drinks instead of milk or other dairy products likely will have lower calcium intakes"); it rots your teeth (because "refined sugar is one of several important factors that promote tooth decay"); it causes heart disease (because "high-sugar diets may contribute to heart disease in people who are 'insulin resistant'"); it gives you kidney stones (possibly because of the phosphoric acid in colas, but "more research needs to be done"); it is spiked with an addictive drug (caffeine) that "can cause nervousness, irritability, sleeplessness, and rapid heart beat"; and it contains other additives that can make children hyperactive and cause "life-threatening" allergic reactions.

Jacobson's list of soda hazards nicely illustrates the hyperbolic approach to health advice favored by CSPI, which the microbiologist turned food activist co-founded in 1971 after working for Ralph Nader. Today the D.C.-based CSPI is one of the country's most influential nanny groups, with an annual budget of $15 million and some 800,000 newsletter subscribers. It has the ability to grab headlines, kill sales of products it doesn't like, and shape regulatory policy. The group is also emblematic of a troubling cultural trend whose motto might be, "If it feels good, don't do it."

The typical CSPI report takes one or two plausible concerns, blows them way out of proportion, and throws in several dangers that are trivial, unlikely, or highly speculative,

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all in an effort to scare people into the one course of action CSPI knows to be right. In the case of soft drinks, Jacobson is plainly alarmed and disgusted by the fact that in 1997 Americans consumed "1.6 12-ounce cans [of soda] per day for every man, woman, and child"—"more than twice the amount produced in 1974." He concludes that "parents and health officials need to recognize soft drinks for what they are—liquid candy—and do everything possible to return those beverages to their former, reasonable role as an occasional treat."

That recommendation displays another CSPI hallmark: extremism disguised as moderation. Is there really no legitimate alternative to the "occasional treat" model of soda consumption? Jacobson's own numbers suggest one. "Artificially sweetened diet sodas," he notes, "account for 24% of sales, up from 8.6% in 1970." Getting rid of the sugar addresses Jacobson's most credible concerns about soft drinks without forcing people to give them up completely. Many people find diet sodas to be perfectly adequate substitutes; they get the flavor they want without the calories.

But the CSPI mind-set rebels at the idea that people might enjoy themselves without paying a price. Jacobson warns that "artificial sweeteners may raise concerns" and asserts that "aspartame should be better tested." A CSPI list of "Food Additives to Avoid" says, "There are quite a few problems with aspartame." According to the 2002 CSPI book *Restaurant Confidential*, co-authored by Jacobson and CSPI nutritionist Jayne Hurley, "Questions have been raised about the safety of aspartame....Some people believe that it causes dizziness, hallucinations, or headaches, but controlled studies have not confirmed those problems. In addition, aspartame needs to be tested better to confirm that it does not cause cancer."

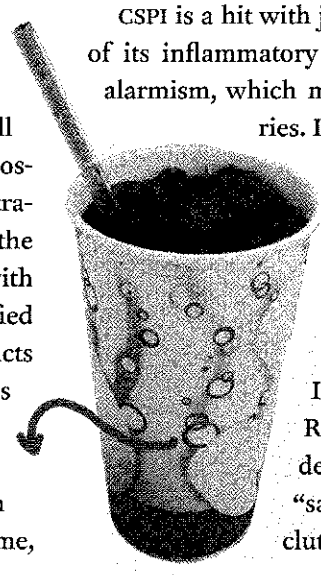
In other words, there is no evidence that aspartame is harmful, but we want to make you vaguely uneasy about drinking diet soda anyway. "Some people believe" that the moon landings were faked and that Elvis is still alive, but that doesn't make it so. And while it is always possible to call for more tests, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA)—which if anything has an incentive to err on the side of keeping products off the market—is satisfied with the studies that have already been done. The only verified risk from aspartame, indicated on the labels of products that contain it, applies to the rare consumer who has trouble metabolizing the amino acid phenylalanine, one of aspartame's components. Aside from that, the FDA says it "has not determined any consistent pattern of symptoms that can be attributed to the use of aspartame, nor is the agency aware of any recent studies that clearly show safety problems."

CSPI's resistance to diet soda—an innovation you might think the organization would embrace, given its frequently expressed concern about the "epidemic of obesity"—is a matter of prejudice, not science. It reflects the group's preference for the natural over the synthetic, its dislike of big business and mass trends, and, perhaps most fundamentally, its suspicion of pleasure without pain, of enjoyment unencumbered by fear. That suspicion is the thread that runs through CSPI's uneasiness about artificial sweeteners and caffeine, its dire warnings about fat and salt, its campaign against the fat substitute olestra, its hysteria about acrylamide in French fries, its discomfort with food irradiation, its condemnation of the imitation-meat product Quorn, and its opposition to alcohol consumption as a way of preventing heart disease. For those who share its asceticism, CSPI offers pseudoscientific rationales to justify their phobias.

Perpetual Lent

The charge that CSPI is puritanical has been heard before, of course, especially in connection with the group's highly publicized hit-and-run reports on restaurant food, which earned it a reputation as "the food police." But if CSPI were nothing but a bunch of pleasure-hating sourpusses, it would be hard to understand the organization's success in generating press coverage and attracting supporters.

CSPI is a hit with journalists largely because of its inflammatory rhetoric and dependable alarmism, which make for eye-catching stories. It also helps that CSPI tries to be clever and often succeeds. It awards the title "Food Porn" to calorie-packed products such as Mrs. Fields' Cinnamon Roll with Cream Cheese Icing. It responded to J.K. Rowling's soda marketing deal with a campaign to "save Harry Potter from the clutches of Coca-Cola," and it



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In CSPI lingo, which relies heavily on adjectives like *artery-clogging* and *heart-stopping*, a baked potato with butter, sour cream, bacon bits, and cheese is "the culinary equivalent of a loaded pistol."

rightly ridiculed the government's use of NASCAR driver Jimmy Spencer, a Budweiser promoter, as an "anti-drug" spokesman. But Jacobson does not have a very thick skin when it's his turn to be mocked. In February he castigated Rick Berman, the restaurant industry lobbyist who runs the anti-CSPI Center for Consumer Freedom, for "the goofy and low-brow tone of his efforts." This from a man whose publicity stunts have included dressing as Tony the Tiger, sending a bag of decayed teeth to the Federal Trade Commission, and whacking at a 50-pound block of vegetable shortening with a hammer and chisel on TV.

It's easy to see why CSPI gets the news media's attention. For the group's supporters, the appeal is different. CSPI's *Nutrition Action Healthletter*, its main source of income, claims more than 800,000 subscribers. You don't get that kind of readership by constantly scaring and haranguing people. The publisher of CSPI's book *Restaurant Confidential*, a spin-off of the group's restaurant reports, says it is selling "very well," with 93,000 copies in print. Like it or not, there clearly is a market for CSPI's product.

Written in a breezy, easily digestible style, CSPI's literature does provide useful information on topics such as the nutritional profiles of various vegetables, the availability of "light" menu items, and the dubious advantages of bottled water. More important, CSPI models a way of life that sets its followers apart from their less health-conscious, less eco-aware neighbors. "Instead of the conspicuous consumption that [economist Thorstein] Veblen talked about," the restaurant critic Robert Shoffner observed in a 1994 interview with the *Washingtonian*, CSPI pushes "conspicuous self-denial....They want us in a state of perpetual Lent." Like religious dietary laws, the rules laid down by CSPI create distinctions, provide structure, and invest everyday decisions with meaning. Underlying this system is an ethic that seems to value discipline and sacrifice for their own sake.

For those who live according to CSPI's edicts, there is never an easy way out. Consider fish, one of the few bright spots in the group's restaurant reviews: low in saturated fat and high in B vitamins and minerals, not to mention the omega-3 fatty acids that may help prevent heart attacks. As long as you don't order it fried or with a sauce, or get butter on your baked potato or dressing on your salad, fish seems to be a good choice in CSPI's book.

But that depends on which book you read. According to the 2002 CSPI book *Is Our Food Safe?: A Consumer's Guide to Protecting Your Health and the Environment*, "eating fish or shellfish can wipe out that species," "wipe out other species," and "pollute and destroy valuable habitats." CSPI adherents need to stay on top of which seafood species and varieties are harvested in a "sustainable," environmentally sensitive manner. Fortunately, "four knowledgeable organizations...have placed lists of good or problematic seafood on their websites," and "some of the groups offer handy wallet-sized cards summarizing their recommendations," although "a few of their conclusions are different."

The authors of *Is Our Food Safe?*—Warren Leon, executive director of the Northeast Sustainable Energy Association, and Caroline Smith DeWaal, CSPI's director of food safety—concede that "most consumers won't want to try to keep track of 40 to 50 different seafood types when they go to the grocery store or out to eat." Only the select few, inspired by a noble vision of eating in harmony with the oceans, will go to such lengths. And in case you're wondering, Leon and DeWaal say fish farming is "no panacea" because "it can actually increase pollution and damage essential natural ecosystems."

CSPI's advice about fruits and vegetables also seems

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CSPI's advice about fruits and vegetables also seems designed to test eager acolytes. Naturally, you should eat lots of them, because they're good for you. Just keep in mind that they may be killing you.

designed to test eager acolytes. Naturally, you should eat lots of them, because they're good for you. Just keep in mind that they may be killing you. "In 1987," say Leon and DeWaal, "the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimated that pesticide residues on food might cause cancer in as many as 6,000 people annually in the United States." Given the uncertainties about extrapolating from huge doses of a chemical in rodents to tiny doses in humans, the actual number may be closer to zero. "No definitive research studies have linked pesticide residues in food to human illnesses," the authors concede. "For the individual consumer, [the] risk may seem small. But it certainly isn't small if it is your family member who faces chemotherapy or the cloud of living with cancer."

Still, you shouldn't let that thought put you off your veggies. "Even though pesticides and other chemicals in our food are a public health concern," *Is Our Food Safe?* advises, "the risks should not discourage you from eating plenty of fruits and vegetables." To reduce those hypothetical, possibly nonexistent risks, Leon and DeWaal urge you to "thoroughly wash and peel your fruits and vegetables." Don't be so reckless as to pick up an apple or pear and take a bite: First you must eliminate the skin, in which lurks "hazardous pesticides...with the potential to cause serious public health effects."

Death Comes to Dinner

If this is how CSPI deals with foods it likes, you can imagine what it has to say about the foods it hates. *Restaurant Confidential* calls dishes that offend CSPI's sensibilities "masterpieces of overwrought excess," which is also an apt description of the group's press releases. In CSPI lingo, which relies heavily on adjectives like *artery-clogging* and *heart-stopping*, a double cheeseburger is "a coronary bypass special," fettuccine Alfredo is "a heart attack on a plate," and a baked potato with butter, sour cream, bacon bits, and cheese is "the culinary equivalent of a loaded pistol."

CSPI prides itself on such over-the-top invective. The preface to *Restaurant Confidential* brags that "the National Restaurant Association labeled us nutrition terrorists," and the book is peppered with the subtle rhetorical touches for which the group is known: "enough to make your arteries howl...make sure your cardiologist is on call...just think: double bypass." Although CSPI insists it does not want to "take the fun out of eating out," its repeated insinuation that ordering the wrong item might just kill you is not exactly conducive to an enjoyable dining experience.

In both *Restaurant Confidential* and *Is Our Food Safe?*, the authors make a point of identifying themselves as moderates who understand the importance of pleasure. And it's true that CSPI is moderate when compared to, say, the vegans at People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (who would be appalled at CSPI's acceptance of fish, poultry, and the occasional piece of lean, well-trimmed red meat) or the anti-dairy activists who insist that milk should play no part in the human diet (CSPI endorses skim milk and permits low-fat cheese). But CSPI avowedly deviates from mainstream thinking among nutritionists, which emphasizes balance, by boldly identifying foods that no one should ever eat. Michael Jacobson's list of the world's worst foods includes hamburgers, whole milk, soda, egg yolks, and salad dressing. The best, he says, are whole wheat bread, sweet potatoes, fresh spinach, cantaloupe, and skim milk. These are not just Jacobson's personal picks and pans, mind you; they are a guide to what every rational person should be eating.

"Our goal has always been to provide reliable information," Jacobson and Hurley say in *Restaurant Confidential*. But CSPI is not shy about telling

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you what you should do with that information. The book includes a "Bottom Line" for each dish it analyzes, in case you're too dim to understand that anything with lots of calories and fat is off-limits. The low-down on pizza with extra cheese: "Never order an extra-cheese pizza." Likewise fried mozzarella sticks ("Just say no"), buffalo wings ("Order something else"), crispy orange beef (ditto), beef and cheese nachos ("Order just about anything else"), a gyro ("There's no way to make this a healthful choice"), a mushroom cheeseburger ("Forget about this one!"), a fried whole onion ("a bomb"), a milk shake ("Skip it"), the Cheesecake Factory's carrot cake ("the worst dessert on the menu"), and cheese fries with ranch dressing ("worse than *anything* we've ever analyzed").

Because Jacobson considers traditional food advice bland and uninformative, CSPI is deliberately provocative. "Most dietitians talk in terms of moderation and balance," he told *The Dallas Morning News* in 1995, "and they wonder why no one listens." Although there is an audience for CSPI's blunt, definitive-sounding advice, I'm not the only one who finds the group's dogmatism and condescension off-putting. Much of the criticism generated by CSPI's restaurant reports has come from food critics, chefs, and nutritionists who emphasize that it's possible to be healthy without renouncing certain foods forever.

Elizabeth Whelan, executive director of the American Council on Science and Health, is one of CSPI's most persistent and perceptive critics. Back in 1992, a year before CSPI launched its "investigation into restaurant nutrition," she put her finger on the attitude behind the project. In a letter to Jacobson, she wrote: "You and your colleagues think in terms of dichotomies—good foods and bad foods; the 10 'best' foods and the 10 'worst' foods. I believe such dichotomies are misleading and unrealistic. There are no good or bad foods, only good or bad diets."

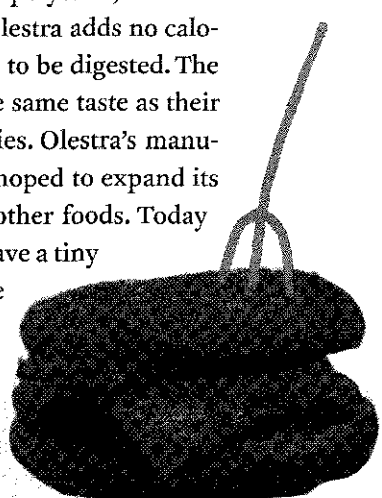
Salt Assault

At least CSPI is on solid scientific ground in warning against overeating. Its obsession with the salt content of food has a much shakier basis. CSPI is constantly decrying the amount of salt in packaged foods and restaurant dishes. "You should aim to consume no more than 2,400 milligrams of sodium a day," *Restaurant Confidential* advises, parroting the federal government's guidelines. Yet "it is nearly impossible to walk out of a restaurant without having consumed 1,000 to 3,000 milligrams." Salt is not a new concern for CSPI. Back in 1978, it was calling salt "the deadly white powder you already snort."

Contrary to the impression given by CSPI, there has never been clear evidence that reducing salt intake helps prevent hypertension. Decades of research have produced conflicting, ambiguous results. Advocates of salt reduction argue that a population-wide decrease in sodium consumption would have a measurable impact. But as a 1998 review of the controversy in *Science* noted, "for the agencies involved to induce the public to avoid salt, they must convince individuals that it's bad for their individual health, which, for those with normal blood pressure, it almost assuredly isn't."

Given the weakness of the evidence, why has CSPI never wavered in its conviction that everyone ought to cut back on salt? You could chalk it up to the group's tendency to err on the side of alarm when confronting speculative risks—the same tendency that helps explain its anxiety about pesticide residues on fruits and vegetables. But it surely doesn't work in salt's favor that it makes food taste so much better—a fact you don't fully appreciate until you've eaten in a home where the cook has taken CSPI's sodium advice to heart. If it tastes good, according to CSPI's implicit logic, it must be bad for you.

This presumption helps explain CSPI's campaign against olestra, a promising fat substitute that the group helped sink by linking it to stomach cramps, diarrhea, and "anal leakage." Foods fried in olestra, a synthesis of sugar and vegetable oil also known as sucrose polyester, have the same texture as foods fried in oil, but olestra adds no calories because its molecules are too large to be digested. The result is potato and corn chips with the same taste as their full-fat counterparts but half the calories. Olestra's manufacturer, Procter & Gamble, originally hoped to expand its use beyond packaged salty snacks to other foods. Today olestra products, introduced in 1996, have a tiny share of the snack market, plans to use it more widely have been abandoned, and Procter & Gamble has sold its olestra plant to another company.



The negative publicity engineered by CSPI had a lot to do with olestra's

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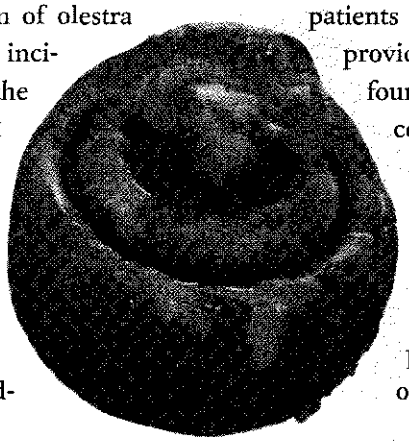
disappointing performance. Because of lobbying by CSPI and its allies, snacks made with olestra bear a daunting FDA warning that they "may cause abdominal cramping and loose stools." Since olestra's molecules pass through the body undigested, it can have gastrointestinal (GI) effects similar to those of foods high in fiber. The difference is that baked beans were never stigmatized with a government warning label. Naturally, when people are told that a certain product causes gastrointestinal symptoms, they are apt to blame it for any discomfort they feel after eating it. "GI disturbances are a common occurrence among the American populace," writes Ruth Kava, director of nutrition at the American Council on Science and Health. "It is likely that the connection [to olestra] was due more to widespread adverse media coverage than to any effect of olestra itself."

Last year CSPI bragged that 20,000 reports of "gastrointestinal misery"—"more than all other food additive complaints in history *combined*"—had been forwarded to the FDA, mostly through CSPI. "Olestra may be circling the drain," Michael Jacobson crowed, but it is still "causing too much pain, embarrassment and inconvenience. That this product was ever allowed on the market at all will go down in history as one of the biggest blunders at the FDA." CSPI said its files were "brimming with grisly reports of diarrhea, fecal incontinence, cramping, bleeding, and yellow-orange oil in toilet bowls and underwear." CSPI has even suggested that olestra can be fatal: "Think of the driver of a giant 18-wheeler barreling down the highway at 70 miles an hour when he gets hit with a bout of fecal urgency."

None of the scatological accounts lovingly cataloged by CSPI proves anything about the effects of eating olestra snacks. All rely on *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* reasoning to impugn a product that may have had nothing to do with the symptoms reported by these "victims." The evidence indicates that CSPI has grossly exaggerated olestra's gastrointestinal impact. A placebo-controlled, double-blind study of olestra reported in *The Journal of the American Medical Association* in 1998 found that "consumption of olestra potato chips...is not associated with increased incidence or severity of GI symptoms, nor does the amount consumed predict who will report GI effects after short-term consumption of either olestra or [regular] potato chips."



Welcome Contaminants

Having scared people away from olestra, CSPI needed to deter them from returning to full-fat snacks. Fortuitously, a group of Swedish researchers last year announced that they had found acrylamide, a rodent carcinogen, in a variety of baked and fried foods. The chemical appears to be produced whenever starches are cooked at high temperatures. Referring to acrylamide as "a probable carcinogen in humans," CSPI said the Swedish discovery was "extremely worrisome." It commissioned its own food tests, which found that, of the products analyzed, fast food French fries had the highest levels of acrylamide, followed by Pringles potato crisps and Fritos corn chips. CSPI called foods with acrylamide "contaminated," as if the chemical's presence had resulted from someone's negligence. That's like saying beer is "contaminated" with alcohol or coffee is "contaminated" with benzo(a)pyrene, a chemical produced when the beans are roasted.

"The amount of acrylamide in a large order of fast-food French fries is at least 300 times more than what the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency allows in a glass of water," CSPI said. It cited an estimate that acrylamide "causes several thousand cancers per year in Americans." By that fall, the estimate had become "several thousand *deaths* in the U.S. each year." (Emphasis added.)

In contrast, a December 2002 report by Rutgers University food chemist Joseph D. Rosen, published by the American Council on Science and Health, notes that "acrylamide has not, even in high exposure occupational settings, been shown to cause cancer in humans." Rosen offers several reasons to be cautious about extrapolating from rodent studies to human exposure and calls the risk from acrylamide in the diet "hypothetical at best." A study reported in the January 13 *British Journal of Cancer*, involving 987 cancer patients and 538 healthy controls, provided further reassurance. It found "no association between consumption of foods high in acrylamide and increased risk of three forms of cancer" (bladder, large bowel, and kidney).

CSPI's decision to scare people about acrylamide is of a piece with its warnings

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For CSPI, the idea that a pleasure could be not only harmless but healthy is anathema. CSPI is determined to find the catch, even when there is none.

about pesticide residues, artificial sweeteners, and other unproven risks. But it also serves CSPI's nutritional agenda. Immediately after the Swedish researchers announced their findings, CSPI called acrylamide "yet another compelling reason to slash [your] consumption of french fries and potato chips." Writing in CSPI's *Nutrition Action Healthletter* last fall, Jacobson observed: "Of course, many health experts have been urging people to cut back on lousy foods like fries all along. But the unwelcome contaminant provides yet another reason."

Likewise, bacteria provide yet another reason for avoiding meat. Food-borne illness has long been a major CSPI concern, but the group is strangely resistant to irradiation as a way of killing pathogens that would otherwise sicken or kill people. *Is Our Food Safe?* concedes that "most irradiated food will be safer than traditional food because irradiation kills bacteria and parasites that cause illness." But the authors implicitly endorse special labels on irradiated food, which reinforce the public's groundless suspicion of the process, and assert that "consumer confidence in the safety of food will depend on making food clean to begin with, not on irradiation as the final processing step."

Similarly, last fall CSPI's DeWaal responded to the sale of irradiated beef at Giant Supermarkets by declaring that "food irradiation is an end-of-the-line solution to a problem that should be cleaned up at the source," which would "eliminate the need for irradiation." She could not resist adding that "the biggest health concern about ground beef is neither the pathogens nor the irradiation, but the saturated fat, which promotes heart disease." DeWaal thereby implied that irradiation *is* a health concern, at the same time suggesting why CSPI might prefer that people continue to worry about food poisoning from ground beef.

Fungus Among Us

Should you decide to give up meat, CSPI wants you to know you've got a range of vegetarian substitutes to choose from. The March 2002 issue of CSPI's *Nutrition Action Healthletter* carried an upbeat article on "Meatless Marvels" that surveyed the fake meat market and recommended the best imitations. Among other developments, the article noted that "the faux-chicken market is about to get a shot in the arm from Quorn, a new dead-ringer for poultry that's already available in Europe." CSPI singled out Quorn as the best poultry substitute by far: "This new product, sold in England for years before it hit U.S. shores, is a 'mycoprotein.' Translation: It's made from a fungus...but a darn good-tasting one. Quorn somehow manages to mimic the texture and taste of moist, tender chicken."

But CSPI quickly lost its enthusiasm for Quorn and gave it the olestra treatment, announcing that the product causes awful gastrointestinal problems and soliciting complaints to that effect. In the May 2002 *Nutrition Action Healthletter*, Jacobson referred to "people who reported vomiting or diarrhea after eating the mycoprotein" and invited consumers with similar experiences to register their complaints at a CSPI-sponsored Web site, www.quorncomplaints.com. The accounts from "victims of Quorn poisoning" that CSPI has collected combine the fecal fascination the group displayed in its attacks on olestra with a 10-year-old's passion for puke: "I suffered severe, sudden nausea followed by a few hours of violent vomiting....I was so ill that I vomited blood....My stool [was] extremely slack, and really foul-smelling...I was twice incontinent of feces in public!"

In addition to the gastrointestinal complaints, Jacobson raised the possibility that "Quorn causes cancer or reproductive problems," despite a complete lack of evidence

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to support such concerns. He expressed a preference for "farm-grown ingredients" over "mold grown in vats" and concluded, "Why anyone would want to eat Quorn is beyond me." In a May 2002 press release, he declared, "This could be the FDA's worst blunder since olestra." A few months later, he was wondering "why 'natural-food' stores...would sully their reputations by selling these vomitburgers" and asking the FDA to order a recall of Quorn products.

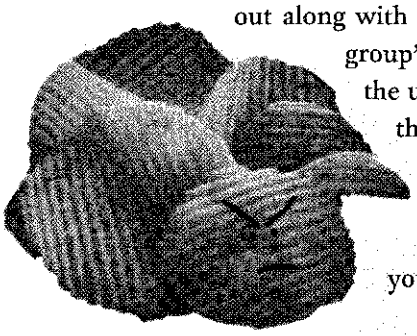
In response to CSPI's criticism, Quorn's manufacturer, Marlow Foods, noted that the product had been available in Europe for 16 years. Millions of people had eaten it, and only a tiny percentage had complained to the company about adverse reactions. There were 89 complaints in 2000, for example, or one per 146,000 consumers.

Last September, after CSPI urged it to ban Quorn, the British Food Standards Agency noted that "any protein-containing food has the potential to cause an allergic reaction," and research before Quorn was introduced in the U.K. indicated "a low level of intolerance to the product." The agency added that "it is important to recognize that several commonly consumed foods and food ingredients have much higher intolerance levels [than Quorn]. For example, the intolerance to soya is reported to be 1 in 300 and that to shellfish, even higher....Taking into account that those who are intolerant to [Quorn] are able to avoid it by studying the label...the Food Standards Agency does not consider that, on present evidence, it would be right to prevent those who currently enjoy this product from being able to continue to purchase it if they wish."

CSPI's Quorn intolerance can be explained partly by the group's quest for publicity (hence Jacobson's hope that Quorn would be "the next olestra"), partly by its aversion to "artificial" foods ("mold grown in vats" vs. "farm-grown ingredients"). Could it also be that Quorn is simply too good a simulation of meat? Perhaps this "dead-ringer for poultry" raised red flags at CSPI because, like olestra, it seemed to offer something for nothing.

Driven to Drink

Given the heaping helpings of anxiety that CSPI dishes out along with its nutritional advice, the group's followers must often feel the urge for a drink. Naturally, they are supposed to resist it. *Is Our Food Safe?* concedes that moderate alcohol consumption "may lower your risk of heart disease."



But CSPI has long resisted attempts to publicize that fact. It went so far as to condemn the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms for allowing wineries to include a suggestion on their labels that consumers seeking "information on the health effects of wine consumption" consult the federal government's *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*.

That pamphlet's section on alcohol is a litany of warnings that includes one positive statement: "Drinking in moderation may lower risk for coronary heart disease, mainly among men over age 45 and women under age 55." CSPI maintains that telling consumers about the guidelines "could increase alcohol problems." George Hacker, CSPI's director of alcohol policies, explains: "Just suggesting that there are potential health benefits in consuming small amounts of alcohol may help heavy drinkers rationalize their unhealthy consumption and justify their dependency."

What about the rest of us? "If you do not drink," *Is Our Food Safe?* advises, "do not start. Exercising and eating better are much safer ways to improve your health." Since there's nothing inherently dangerous about moderate alcohol consumption, one suspects the crucial point is that working out and dieting are much less fun than drinking. For CSPI, the idea that a pleasure could be not only harmless but healthy is anathema. CSPI is determined to find the catch, even when there is none.

If CSPI's hypervigilant lifestyle seems overwhelming, you can start small. Avoiding olestra and Quorn is easy enough. Then you can move on to alcohol, caffeine, diet soda, nonorganic produce, salt, sugar, fat, and the rest of CSPI's food taboos. Soon, perhaps, you will feel safer and healthier, or at least more virtuous. For my part, I think I'll try some cheese fries with ranch dressing. They've never tempted me before, but if CSPI says they're "worse than *anything* we've analyzed," they must be pretty damned good. ▮

Senior Editor Jacob Sullum (jsullum@reason.com) is the author of Saying Yes: In Defense of Drug Use (Tarcher/Putnam).

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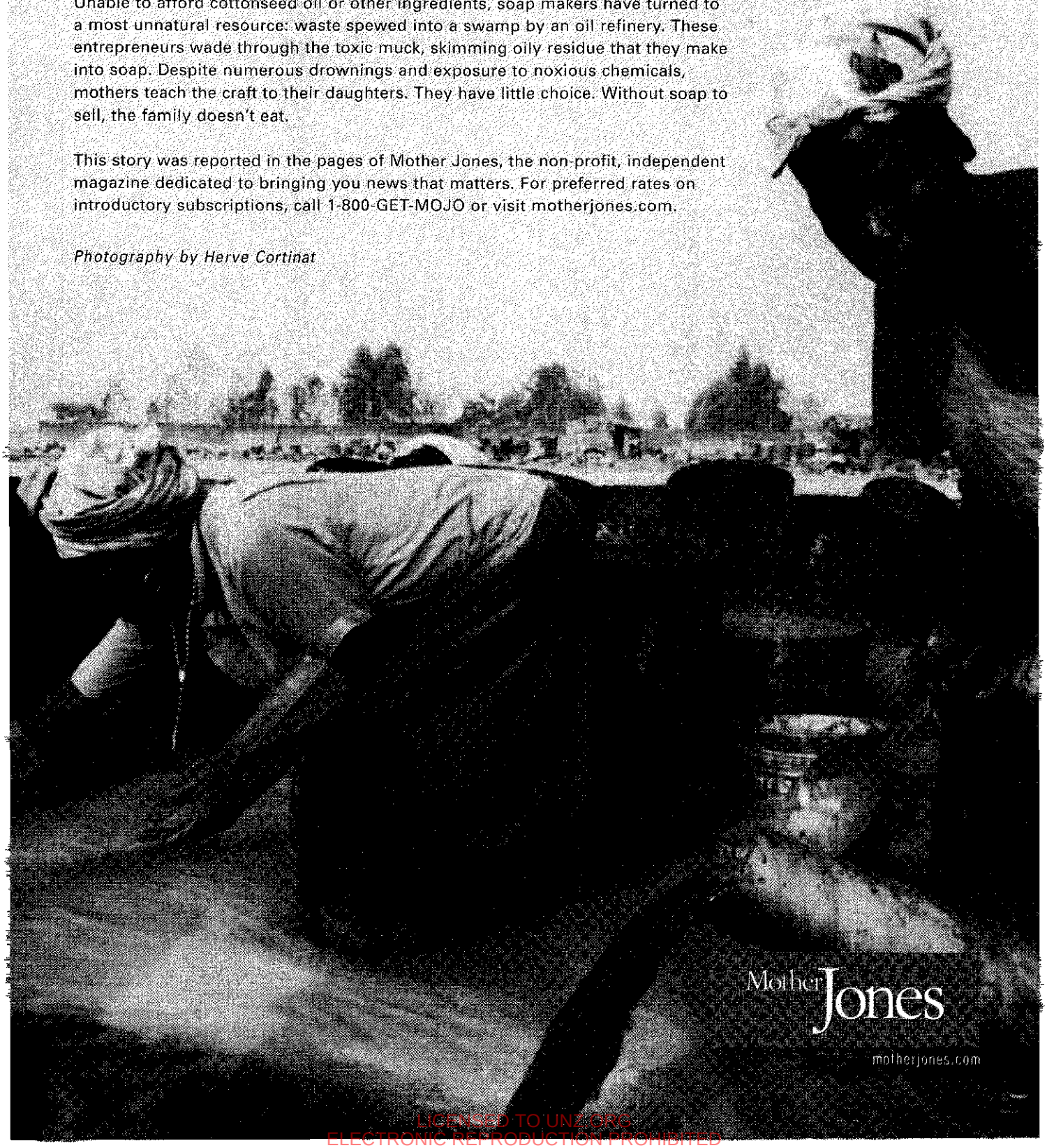
WHILE MAINSTREAM NEWS WAS BUSY COVERING "SURVIVOR" THE TV SHOW, THE WOMEN OF BURKINA FASO WERE PLAYING IT FOR REAL.

With celebrity fluff and infotainment often masquerading as "news," you're less likely to hear about desperate places like Burkina Faso, a West African nation where more than 50% of the people live in poverty.

Unable to afford cottonseed oil or other ingredients, soap makers have turned to a most unnatural resource: waste spewed into a swamp by an oil refinery. These entrepreneurs wade through the toxic muck, skimming oily residue that they make into soap. Despite numerous drownings and exposure to noxious chemicals, mothers teach the craft to their daughters. They have little choice. Without soap to sell, the family doesn't eat.

This story was reported in the pages of Mother Jones, the non-profit, independent magazine dedicated to bringing you news that matters. For preferred rates on introductory subscriptions, call 1-800-GET-MOJO or visit motherjones.com.

Photography by Herve Cortinat



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Cutting the Tripwire

It's time to get out of Korea.

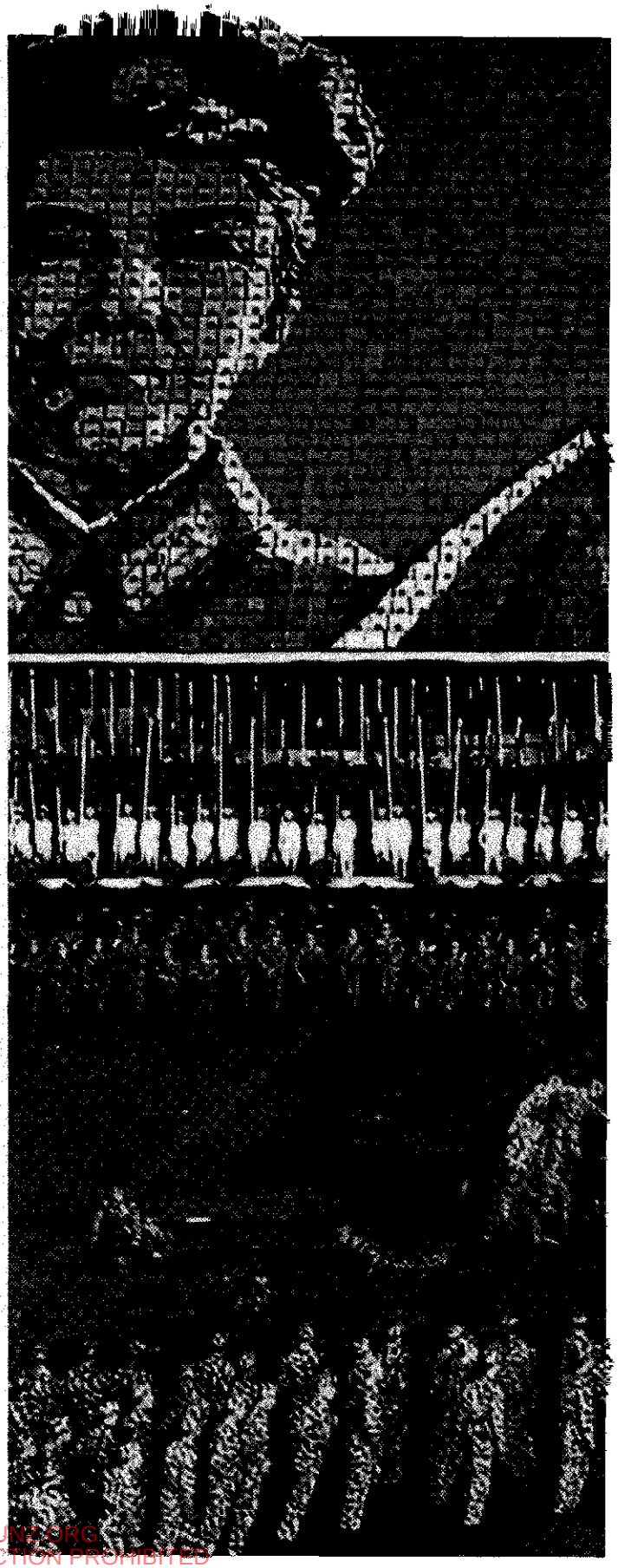
Doug Bandow

As the Bush administration prepared for war in Iraq, North Korea steadily raised the nuclear ante, restarting its mothballed reactor and threatening to produce a regular supply of plutonium. As Gulf War II wound down, Undersecretary of State John Bolton declared that North Korea should "draw the appropriate lesson from Iraq." Pyongyang then agreed to talks that included China, while Washington abandoned its precondition that the North eliminate the uranium enrichment program that touched off the crisis. The road ahead almost certainly will be filled with disappointments, frustrations, and threats, with no guarantee that an agreement will be reached.

But why is the U.S. worried about the so-called Democratic People's Republic of Korea? It's a distant and poor country surrounded by far more powerful states; it is an economic irrelevancy and a diplomatic nonentity. Most important, it has no effective means to attack America. North Korea should be a problem for other nations—for China and Russia, the most important regional powers, and for Japan and South Korea, America's closest regional friends. All have more at stake in the North than we do. Indeed, the only reason Washington is entangled in the Korean peninsula is inertia: The U.S. has defended South Korea for 50 years.

The alliance with the Republic of Korea—actually a one-sided security guarantee—has been America's most consistently dangerous commitment since World War II. The nearly 34,000 deaths in the Korean War have been supplemented by further flare-ups, such as the North's 1968 seizure of the *USS Pueblo* and its 1976 murder of two U.S. soldiers cutting down a tree in the demilitarized zone. Reports of other, unpublicized incidents abound, including full-fledged firefights between American forces and North Korean soldiers entering the South. The Korea Defense Veterans of America estimate that 1,500 Americans have been killed by Northern forces since the Korean War ended.

Yet South Korea is beginning to look away. During his presidential campaign last fall, eventual victor Roh



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Protecting oneself is an important attribute of sovereignty. If Seoul puts its security in Washington's hands, it is giving Washington authority to make the decisions. No South Korean could expect the U.S. to risk war on the South's terms.

Moo-hyun suggested that his nation "mediate" in any war between America and the North and called for "concessions from both sides." He even added, "We should proudly say we will not side with North Korea or the United States." Before leaving office in February, President Kim Dae-jung attempted to chart an independent course between Washington and Pyongyang. The head of Roh's transition team, Lim Chae-jung, developed a proposal that sought "a concession" from both America and North Korea. This is an alliance?

Although North Korea's nuclear program has understandably attracted Washington's eyes, America's relationship with the South requires equal attention. The nuclear controversy grows out of the unnatural U.S. military presence on the Korean peninsula, and no solution is likely until that presence is removed.

Well before the present contretemps, it was evident that the 37,000 troops in the South were a Cold War artifact that had lost its raison d'être. Washington's commitment was a result of the post-World War II division of the peninsula, the North's subsequent invasion of the South, and China's intervention on the Northern side. After the war ended, South Korea had an unpopular, authoritarian government and a primitive economy. But for Washington's promise to go to war, backed by an occupying garrison, Seoul likely would not have survived another attack.

The Cold War is now over, and Beijing and Moscow are friendlier with Seoul than with Pyongyang. China and Russia trade far more with the South, and the latter has become a significant investor in the People's Republic of China. Russia has even paid off debts by shipping weapons to South Korea. Although both nations retain ties with North Korea—indeed, both have competed a bit for influence during the last couple of years—they have far more at stake in the peninsula's continuing stability and the South's continuing prosperity than in the North's "victory," political or military.

Nor does Pyongyang have any other allies of note. With a trail of bad international debts and barely 1 percent of the South's foreign trade, the North is an insignificant economic player. Despite a recent charm offensive that led to official ties with a number of Asian and European nations, the renewed nuclear crisis has brought that diplomatic effort to a halt. Whatever good will North Korea's summit with Japan generated has dissipated; the U.S. will talk about nothing else until the nuclear issue is resolved.

Moreover, the South has left the North far behind economically: It has 40 times the gross domestic product (GDP), twice the population, and an overwhelming technological edge. It took a significant economic hit in the 1997 Asian economic crisis but since then has recovered its status as one of Asia's tigers. In 2000 it enjoyed a GDP of $462 billion, making it the world's 12th largest economy. It significantly outproduces not just North Korea but Russia.

The North is in no position to compete. It is an economic wreck, with an economy that South Korean analysts estimate to have shrunk by half between 1993 and 1996 alone. Its subsequent "recovery" is thought to have pushed per capita GDP to about $700, roughly 40 percent of the 1990 level. Food production is down 60 percent during the last 15 years. Much of the country lacks electricity much of the time. Life expectancy fell 10 percent during the 1990s. During the same decade hundreds of thousands of people—perhaps as many as 2 million—starved to death. Approximately six in 10 North Koreans are malnourished. The country has been reduced to begging for millions of tons of food aid.

Only in the military sphere does the North retain any advantage. Even there, its forces are large, but its weapons are ancient, with the newest ones dating to 1990. There is no money for spare parts, and training is nonexistent. Pyongyang's dramatic attempt to launch a satellite in 1998 failed. "The North Korean military is one that is using antiquated 1950s and 1960s vintage weapons," reports Defense Intelligence Agency analyst Bruce Bechtol, "while the South Korean military continues to strengthen itself with dynamic new programs such as the building of brand new F-16s. In addition, the South is superior in other key aspects of military readiness, such as command and control and training."

Although South Korea's ground forces are smaller, they would be fighting on the defensive—a military advantage

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—with superior air and naval support. Indeed, in the initial stage of any war, South Korea would have to rely primarily upon its own military for ground forces, irrespective of America's defense commitment. It would take the U.S. weeks to deploy heavy armored and mechanized reinforcements, depending upon events elsewhere and available lift capabilities.

Moreover, South Korea has begun a serious space program, launching a three-stage liquid-fueled rocket, produced at home, last November; it hopes to launch a satellite in two more years. Seoul also has unveiled plans for an ocean-going navy, one more obviously directed at Japan and China than North Korea.

To the extent that the South's military lags behind its antagonist's, that is a matter of choice, not necessity. Nothing prevents Seoul from building a larger force. Rather, the American tripwire discourages it from doing so. As the South acknowledges in its own defense reports, it *chose* to focus on economic development at the expense of military strength—a plan it can follow securely as long as America protects it.

Unfortunately, while the South needs no help to defend itself against its shell of a neighbor, American soldiers are everywhere: arriving at Seoul's international airport, based at the 630-acre Yongsan Army Garrison in downtown Seoul, and on maneuvers around the country. Some number of fights, traffic accidents, and crimes are inevitable. Last fall, when a military court acquitted two soldiers who ran over two children, demonstrations broke out across the nation. Koreans jeered, ostracized, barred from stores, and in a few cases physically attacked their supposed protectors. One American soldier was even kidnapped by a mob after a serviceman refused to accept a leaflet attacking the U.S. over the deaths of the two girls. Some Koreans are boycotting American goods.

Before taking office, President Roh promised not to "kowtow" to the U.S. and called for a more "equal" relationship. All of the presidential candidates—including the one favored by Washington, conservative Lee Hoi-chang—demanded a change in the Status of Forces Agreement, which covers a variety of issues involving the investigation and custody of U.S. soldiers accused of a crime. But the nation will never be America's equal as long as America is defending it. Protecting oneself is among the most important attributes of sovereignty. If Seoul instead puts its security in Washington's hands, it is giving Washington authority to make the decisions. No South Korean could expect the U.S. to risk war on the South's terms. And as long as Seoul wants an occupying garrison, it must expect to be treated like an occupied country. That means American forces appropriately receive special protections not available to tourists.

The Status of Forces Agreement has long been a matter of controversy. Earlier revision talks date back to November 2000. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld initially dismissed the possibility of more changes, but the two governments subsequently established a task force to review the agreement. But Washington can go only so far. The U.S. cannot deploy American citizens in other nations and leave them to the tender mercies of local residents, alien cultures, and unfamiliar legal systems. It would be particularly unfair to do so while anti-Americanism is resurgent, since South Korean justice is not immune to such influences. (It was the three soldiers attacked by a Korean mob, and not those who beat them and kidnapped one of them, whom the Korean police charged with assault.) A Status of Forces Agreement is part of the price a nation pays when it turns its security over to another country.

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Why is America still in Korea? The security commitment is the only reason the North breathes fire against Washington. If the U.S. withdrew, Pyongyang would pose no serious threat to us.

Placing even greater pressure on this unequal arrangement is disagreement about proper policy toward North Korea. Some 24 million people, roughly half of South Korea's population, live in the Seoul-Inchon metropolitan region. Yet Seoul sits barely 25 miles from the border, vulnerable to artillery and Scud missile attack. Thus, the costs of mishandling the North would be horrific for the South. As President Roh has said, war "is such a catastrophic result that I cannot even imagine. We have to handle the North-South relations in such a way that we do not have to face such a situation."

Washington, by contrast, has almost casually considered plunging the peninsula into war. Former President Bill Clinton admits that his administration prepared for a military strike against the North during the first nuclear crisis, without consulting the South. President Roh understandably complained. "We almost went to the brink of war in 1993 with North Korea," he later said, "and at the time we didn't even know it."

Upon what can Seoul rely to avoid a new conflict? There are reports that President Bush rejected a military course after then-President Kim Dae-jung personally described the carnage of the Korean War. Yet Bush explicitly refuses to rule out any option. Secretary Rumsfeld has called the Kim Jong-il government a "terrorist regime," offering an obvious justification for action. And it is hard to find anyone who speaks with administration officials off the record who believes their publicly pacific intentions.

Indeed, some hawks flaunt their lack of concern for Seoul's views. Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) opines that "while they may risk their populations, the United States will do whatever it must to guarantee the security of the American people. And spare us the usual lectures about American unilateralism. We would prefer the company of North Korea's neighbors, but we will make do without it if we must." Frank Gaffney of the Center for Security Policy hits a similar note: "The desire of dangerous nations' neighbors to accommodate, rather than confront, them is understandable. But it should not be determinative of U.S. policy. Such pleading today from South Korea and Japan is reminiscent of the Cold War advocacy for détente by leftists in the West German government." Apparently, America's allies should gaily commit suicide at Washington's command.

Like politicians everywhere, President Roh began dancing toward the political center once elected, calling the U.S.-Korean alliance "precious." The serious possibility of a rupture in the relationship has forced South Koreans to confront the potentially significant budget cost of augmenting their military forces to make up for an American troop withdrawal.

But no policy Band-Aids will save the two nations' relationship. Moving Yongsan base out of Seoul or cutting a few troops ignores the basic issue. Rumsfeld is reportedly considering pulling U.S. troops back from the demilitarized zone, but that would merely expose the deployment's lack of purpose. A tripwire in Pusan is no tripwire, or at least not one with any value.

Why is America still in Korea? The security commitment is the only reason the North breathes fire against Washington. If the U.S. withdrew, Pyongyang would pose no serious threat to us. Today it wields only an untested missile with the theoretical possibility of hitting Alaska or the West Coast, and it knows that attacking America would ensure obliteration. In contrast, leaving forces on the peninsula creates 37,000 nearby nuclear hostages if Pyongyang develops a nuclear arsenal. The troop presence also further strains a military that intends to garrison a defeated Iraq along with the Balkans, all while searching for Al Qaeda worldwide.

Alliances are created at particular times to meet particular threats. They are not ends in themselves, to be preserved no matter how much the world changes. Instead of augmenting its forces in the Pacific and threatening Pyongyang with war, the U.S. should bring home its troops and turn the problem of Pyongyang over to its neighbors, where it belongs.

Doug Bandow, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute, is the author of Tripwire: Korea and U.S. Foreign Policy in a Changed World (Cato).

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Where the Shah Went Alone

Meditations on a life under tyranny

Iraj Isaac Rahmim

When I was 5 years old and growing up in Iran, I once spent an entire weekend trying to decide whether the Shah went to the toilet. I sat at my small wooden desk, fist under chin, summoning all I knew about human anatomy and royalty, about God and the prophets.

It was the 1960s. By this time, over 20 years into his reign, the Shah's publicity machine had elevated him to the status of demigod. He had survived popular uprisings and assassination attempts, creating an illusion of invincibility and an air of holiness that apparently deluded even him. His name and image were everywhere: on the news at all hours, on the first page of every schoolbook, and on outdoor paintings and statues depicting him riding a horse, holding a child, and granting land to a farmer. On TV he wore brilliantly appointed uniforms with uncountable medals—won in which war, I do not know—and was surrounded by

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bowing and curtsying subjects, many wearing uniforms almost as glittery as his. They were usually in one of his many impressive palaces. These had such names as the *Golestan* (Palace of the Flowers), which held the Peacock Throne, or the Marble Palace, with its famous Hall of Mirrors. It was all quite surreal, as if transmitted from another world where the rules of physics and biology might not apply.

In those days, the prophet Mohammed and his descendants, the Shi'ite imams, were deemed too holy to be represented by human actors, so they were shown on television and in movies as bright rays of light that emanated reverberating baritone voices. I imagined that the blinding glitter of the Shah's presentation was a compromise, a halfway point to such holiness. He was part human, part bright light.

We had not a national anthem but a *Shah-an-Shahi* ("King of Kings") anthem, which began with "Our *Shah-an-Shah*, may you live long." At some point they changed a verse from "for a quarter of a century, you have been the King of Iran" to "for half a century, you have been the King of Iran." This change was wrought in that exaggerating Middle Eastern manner; it happened at about the 30th year of his reign, six or seven years before he was overthrown.

Our Pledge of Allegiance was no better. Every morning we assembled in the schoolyard in proper rows by class level and, led by an upperclassman, pledged our allegiance to "God, Shah, Motherland" in that order. Years later, I once inadvertently skipped *Shah* when leading the pledge and saw my teachers fidget. This kind of thing could result in a visit from the secret police, the dreaded *Savak*.

Given all this, I am proud that on that weekend many years ago, I concluded that the Shah relieved himself from time to time, and so did the Queen and the Crown Prince, even though this would have made them just *too* human.

Reza Shah (1878–1944), who was the father of the last Shah, sympathized with Nazi Germany. I don't know whether this was merely tactical or whether he held authentically Nazi beliefs, but because of Iran's strategic position he was forced out by the Allies early in World War II, sent into exile, and replaced by his 20-year-old son, Mohammad Reza. Reza Shah returned to Iran only after his death and was buried near Tehran beneath a grand mausoleum erected in his honor.

At some point during Reza Shah's reign it was "discovered" that Iranians were descendants of the Aryan race, who, on their way from Central Asia to Germany millennia ago, left an offshoot in the Middle East. As such, Iranians

Courtesy of Iraj Isaac Rahmim

were racially different from—and superior to—the Semitic race, which included the neighboring Arabs. (I'm doubtful: The average Iranian looks more like his many Arab neighbors than he does any Germans I know.) Over the years, this idea took hold within the Iranian mainstream and is taught and debated to this day. In fact, a few years into his reign, the last Shah promoted himself to the title of *Shah-an-Shah Arya-Mehr*; roughly translated, it means King of Kings, Lover of Aryans.

We'd line up often in elementary school to march and sing nationalistic songs. And if you passed by the *Nobakht* (New Fortune) Elementary School near the *Vali'ahd* (Crown Prince) Circle sometime in the late 1960s, you might have found me, a little Jewish kid with huge brown eyes, thick black eyebrows, olive-colored skin, and a prominent nose, standing in military formation along with dozens of other little boys and girls, singing with fervor, no doubt a bit off-key, a beautiful nationalist song:

...We are the Aryans,
We will give our lives for the Motherland...

I went on my first military march at the age of 6. That year, schools organized children close in age to the Crown Prince Reza, who was named after his grandfather Reza Shah but never ascended to the throne, to march in the city's main stadium on the prince's birthday. As I was one year and 16 days younger than the Crown Prince, my parents were notified, and I have vague memories of getting fitted at the assigned

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tailor shop for my brown military uniform with gold buttons, shoulder tassels, and a large cap, and then going for a formal photo shoot another day. (I still have the picture, which shows me standing in a near-Napoleonic pose with one thumb inserted under my coat.) On the birthday, my classmates and I were excited as we were bused to march "in front of the Crown Prince," but we instead found ourselves, along with thousands of other children, in an empty stadium goose-stepping in front of a huge photograph of the young royal. (I suppose His Excellency was otherwise occupied.) According to my mother, I returned home dusty and sweaty and very tired, threw a temper tantrum, and tried to bite her arms.

I saw Crown Prince Reza in person a few years later at a soccer match between the Iranian and Australian national teams, where my father had got us seats under the Royal Box. I recall the Australian ambassador and his wife two rows in front of us; this section was reserved for dignitaries. Every third seat, however, was taken by young men in ill-fitting suits who did not look like dignitaries. They all seemed to know one another, and they had what looked like violin cases by their feet. By the time the Crown Prince and his entourage arrived and we stood for the pre-game *Shah-an-Shahi* anthem, I had figured out that they were the secret service and played at getting their attention. I stood erect for the anthem, slowly bringing one hand up from the side toward my belt as though to grab something, and watched my neighbor watch me from the corner of his eye with concern. As a teenager, I was clever but stupid.

At some point Iran scored and I looked behind at the box while jumping and shouting, and saw Reza do the same, fist pumping into the air, screaming "We scored! We scored!" He seemed smaller than I expected and looked like any other soccer-mad teenager.

Reza Shah, founder of the Pahlavi dynasty, was said to be a fearsome and willful man, good for our "backward" country.

My grandfather, born in 1900, told me this story about him. Once Reza Shah passed, with his entourage, through a street in Tehran and noticed the absence of public toilets. He ordered the mayor to build a large facility "'by the end of the day, and I will return and hang you on the very spot if this is not done.' And that is how they built the toilets in one day," my grandfather would say with admiration.

My grandfather valued order, cleanliness, and the rule of law above all else. He was born and raised in a provincial town in the mountains of western Iran, at a time when ethnic conflicts, government corruption, religious intolerance, and western colonial dominance made daily life a risky venture. He ran away from his home in the Jewish ghetto at 16 to go to Baghdad, then a commercial center, was robbed down to his underwear in the frozen winter, returned home humiliated, and ran away again. For a while he took jobs as a driver or mechanic for the British. Then he met my grandmother, married, and settled again in his provincial birthplace, where he worked as a driver for many years before starting a truck parts business.

When one has grown up where the government has been corrupt and randomly lawless for generations, where foreign powers come and go, one craves order, security, and clarity about the consequences of one's actions.

Once, when he was a young man delivering a car to Tehran, he encountered a crowd blocking the road. He forced the car through the crowd, inch by inch, until he found himself at the center of the gathering face to face with Reza Shah himself.

"What are you doing, man?" the Shah asked my grandfather.

"Delivering an automobile, Your Excellency," my grandfather replied in his deep Kurdish accent. Then he bowed.

The Shah laughed and waved him through. "He knew I was just an uneducated provincial driver," explained my grandfather. "He was a fair man."

I imagine when one has grown up where highwaymen rob you naked in midday, where the government has been corrupt and randomly lawless for generations, where foreign powers come and go, where religious persecution is the unquestioned routine, one craves order, security, and clarity about the consequences of one's actions. And so a Reza Shah or even a Mussolini or Stalin are accepted and admired in their own time, and wistfully remembered by the old once they are gone and the land has settled back into its ancient and familiar chaos.

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As a child, I could not make sense of the social structure in Iran, whose elements were personally beneficial to me in some ways but not in others.

Growing up, I found that it was good to be the son of a doctor, of a professor, of people of relative comfort. In fact, it was good to be a son. It was also good to be apolitical, as we were.

It was not good to be Jewish or Baha'i, or Christian or Zoroastrian. (We did not know of any other options.) I felt that being Christian (mostly Armenians and the rumored-to-exist-but-never-seen Assyrians of western Iran) was better. They were not mocked by friends, avoided by strangers, or put down by teachers as we Jews were. (That didn't happen often in my family's protected circle, but once or twice in a lifetime is enough.) Armenians seemed jolly people. They sang and danced, had fun accents, owned most of the delis in town, and sold liquor. I remember thinking that Zoroastrians were not so badly off either. Their population, at least in Tehran, seemed small enough for them to be considered a relic of the nation's 3,000-year-old fire-worshipping past. (I imagined their children placing the dead bodies of their parents atop mountains to be devoured by vultures, as Zoroastrians were said to do. It seemed very cool.)

During one trip to London, I was horrified to see "Death to the Shah" graffiti on public buildings, in Persian and English. Until then I had known of no overt dissatisfaction with, and no strong opposition to, our way of life.

My mother admonished us not to go out on Ashura, the day of mourning for a Shi'ite imam killed at the dawn of Islam. If we did go out, we were not to wear red, smile, let it be known that we were Jewish, or eat in public. To my child's mind, this had no internal logic. Here was a holiday where throngs come to the streets tearing at their clothes and beating their bodies with such passion and ferocity that the uninitiated passerby might easily think they were mourning the recent death of a loved one, not that of the innocent son of Ali 14 centuries earlier. All we knew as children was that being Jewish plus wearing red plus Ashura equaled certain death, or at least a beating.

I first noticed dissent in my early teens. At an aunt's wedding, following the rabbi's flowery invocations for the health of the Shah, a family friend refused to say "amen." He did so quietly, without making a point of it, and only my mother and I noticed because we stood beside him. I was 13.

The next year I spent some summer weeks in a small British fishing village. I was supposed to study English, but mostly I ditched class and took the train to London with my Iranian classmates. (What liberating discoveries these were, both the trains and the freedom from parental oversight.) During one trip to central London, I was horrified to see "Death to the Shah" graffiti on public buildings, in Persian and English. I recounted these to my English family that night, nearly in tears. Until then I had known of no overt dissatisfaction with, and no strong opposition to, our way of life. Life was simple and well-organized. Its outlines and limitations were provided by the government and assented to by my elders, to my innocent eyes willingly and happily. I did not know—nor did it matter to me at the time, I suppose—that our comfort was not the result of a social contract among free citizens, that our seemingly modern and secular society was only so at the surface, ready to burst from its own contradictions. Nor had I understood the reality of our lives as middle-class members of a religious minority group, perched at the intersection of fear and comfort.

As a teenager, I was envious of the very rich and powerful and of the royalty. I wanted to be like them. Thanks to my parents' positions as successful doctors, we were close enough to the powerful to observe their lives but did not have as much money ourselves. Once we went to a house, a mansion really, to drop off my sister with a classmate. The house had two-story balconies with columns, an exterior grand staircase that reminded me of the scale of Persepolis, and a large, gated garden. After that I fantasized for hours about living in such a house and having several maids and butlers instead of our one. Our reality, our averageness, seemed intolerable.

I sometimes behaved mysteriously in front of people to appear more exceptional than I was. In high school, which was unique to begin with—among the top schools for overachievers in the country, built by wealthy Jews thrown out of Iraq after 1948—I pretended that my father was

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a *Savaki*, that he carried a gun, and that he could have anyone—teachers, the principal, and the bullies or their parents—arrested and tortured on a whim. In the streets I talked into my watch, pretending to be a *Savaki* myself, keeping the masses in their place. Around friends I wasted money, once literally pulling small bills out of my pocket and throwing them one by one to the wind as we walked down the street. Yes, I was wealthy enough to waste.

I made up stories about my ancestry. I pretended that my grandfather had been a horseman and a bandit who raided Iraqi prisons with his gang and freed political and religious prisoners. "There is a price on his head," I would claim proudly with a mysterious smile, "to this day." The truth is that, though he crossed the Iran-Iraq border many times in his life, mostly illegally, this was for family and business reasons and was not uncommon for the times.

When I was 13, we adopted a beautiful one-and-a-half-year-old black and brown dachshund, already named Lady by the previous owner. The vague suggestion by a colleague of my mother that the breed had won a competition, together with Lady's general excitability, developed into a belief that Lady's parents and grandparents had won major races in Britain. (I had no idea that "competition" could be anything but a race.) The name itself, coupled with what I knew about British aristocracy, mainly from *The Prince and the Pauper*, gradually blossomed to rather complicated names such as "Her Excellency Lady Manchester of Derbyshire, the First Daughter of Sir Blah of Blah." (I knew the city names from watching English Premiere League football.) I would stand in front of the bathroom mirror and recite these with pride, bowing elegantly at the passing dignitaries. (Years later, I overheard an uncle give meaningless big-worded speeches in front of his bathroom mirror. "Capitulation Standardization Exaltation Anesthetization..." he would orate. Apparently, this stuff ran in the family.)

Adults, being more sophisticated, fantasized themselves into distraction by turning inward. My parents and grandparents and aunts and uncles focused on me. I was a first-born son like the Crown Prince Reza and, they said, I looked like him. I was also the first grandchild on all sides, a boy no less. My birthday, the 25th of the Iranian month of Aban, around November, which was in the same month as that of Crown Prince Reza (ninth of Aban) and his father the Shah (fourth of Aban), was celebrated vigorously. "Month of kings," my grandmother would say with pride.

I recall celebratory exclamations by parents and teachers upon my doing anything slightly out of the ordinary. My handwriting would be shown as an example to follow, my interest in books was rewarded with a generous book allowance, and I was paraded in front of guests to read aloud. One afternoon I ran home from school with my report card full of the highest grades. "This is so wonderful," my mother said. "I am so proud of you, sweetheart. I know some day you will win the Nobel Prize."

Some years ago, I mentioned to my mother over the telephone that I had a cold. "You are my son," she exclaimed with great faith. "You cannot get sick." Since then, I rarely tell her when I am sick or injured, or in trouble and need help.

My American girlfriend, Laura, and I often discuss what it would be like to have been raised in the other's

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circumstance. Born in New York City in the mid-1960s, she is the third of eight from fairly aloof parents. Hers was an upbringing of being lonely in a crowd, almost of neglect, and mine was one of being watched at all times, with impossible expectations destined to go unfulfilled. As a result, I have grown more comfortable with her family, going unnoticed, than with my own. Sitting in a room with my mother, I cover up with long, baggy pants and oversized shirts and coats, and curl up in a far couch, minimizing myself as might a threatened animal from her loving and inspecting eyes. I tell her next to nothing, certainly nothing truthful, about my affairs. When showing travel pictures to her, I edit them heavily, presenting a lot of beautiful scenery, opening only for the most inert questioning.

In Laura's family, I am lost in the scenery.

During the 1980s, when I was a struggling graduate student in California, I constructed a radical version of "all men are created equal": "all persons plus all their belongings are created equal." To clarify, let us consider the case of two persons, Dr. Rich and Mrs. Pauper. Their status, based on the above, can be represented as:

Dr. Rich + Dr. Rich's Possessions = Mrs. Pauper + Mrs. Pauper's Possessions

For simplicity, let us assume that Mrs. Pauper has no possessions. Therefore:

Dr. Rich + Dr. Rich's Possessions = Mrs. Pauper

Further manipulated, this leads to:

Dr. Rich < Mrs. Pauper

In plain English, Dr. Rich is intrinsically worth less, as a human being, than Mrs. Pauper. I wish I could say this formulation was due to an egalitarian streak in me, and perhaps in part it was. But the construct was mostly my way of justifying my aversion to chasing money and success, or rather a reflection of my own expectation of failure, and perhaps also the result of my not-so-latent envy of the very wealthy and the aristocracy. When insecurity struck, as it did often, I would try to convince myself that I was more valuable than a more successful colleague, or that unknown man in the street, looking sharp, perhaps wealthy beyond belief, in a hurry with a place to go. And certainly worth more than the royalty with their billions and palaces and advisers and followers.

I once tried to convince my mother of this theory when we were preparing for a typically gaudy Iranian wedding in Los Angeles. I explained that she, a famed professor respected for her intellect and service, does not need to compete with other women, wealthier women, with their expensive, Parisian designer clothes and their blinding diamond necklaces, that she should leave these lower women to their own affairs. This did not work, but a female relative overheard me, understood my comments for what they meant, and was offended.

Laura and I took a tour of Buckingham Palace during a recent trip to London. This was something I had not done since my original stay in England many years earlier. We stood in line to buy tickets, went through the usual security checks, marveled at the grand courtyard and the staircases and the columns, were led from room to room, and were impressed with the beautiful paintings and the porcelains and the statues, with the thrones and the gold, and with the dazzlingly carved and painted ceilings. Signs explained, in great detail, that the palace and the art are held in trust for the British people, that fees are used for repairs and maintenance, and that these costs are staggering.

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There was a gift shop at the start of the tour where we were encouraged to buy the guidebook and other paraphernalia and another, much larger shop after the tour where we found jewelry, plates, books, gum, chocolate, pencils, shirts, ties, paperweights, and God knows what else, all embossed, imprinted, engraved, stamped, or carved with the palace logo. On the way out we were led to a point far from the entrance with signs pointing us to the Royal Stables, which could be easily reached and visited for additional money.

As the day wore on, I felt unusually offended by the commercialization, the explanations, the money, and the monarchy itself. The same feelings returned the next day when I attended services at Westminster Abbey to hear the chorus. As in my childhood in Iran, a portion of the service revolved around blessings and prayers for the monarch and associates—the queen, the royal family, and members of the Order of Bath. Now, so many years later, I could not bring myself to say "amen." Being there, surrounded by signs of aristocracy and royalty and the casual belief in their specialness, I could not accept that any person could be entrusted with power, with a halo, or even with respect simply due to an accident of birth. I repeated this once or twice to Laura, who accused me of being my usual melodramatic Middle Eastern self.

I remembered another trip we had taken, one to Washington, D.C., at the height of the cherry blossom season. The weather was mild, and the public spaces and walkways around the monuments were covered in the pink and white of the petals. We toured the White House, where I was surprised by—and then warmly proud of—its relative simplicity and modest size. There was no imprint of a single person or family. The place had a modern air of transience, of a functional building where occupants come to work and then go away. It was a comfortable place to be, full of simple white walls, seemingly adorned as an afterthought.

We also toured the Capitol on that trip. (It was easy to enter; we had not yet been visited by September 11.) We explored long corridors lined with statues and echoing meeting halls, and randomly, almost chaotically, mixed with other camera-toting tourists and formally attired staff and congressmen and women. There were several cafeterias and restaurants inside, frequented by visitors and hurried workers alike. We had lunch in one off a basement hallway next to some offices—not a particularly memorable lunch, some sandwiches. I remember going, afterward, to the men's room near the smaller-than-expected Senate chamber. As I stood along with others in front of a row of urinals, the man next to me let out a quiet chuckle and turned to me.

"Top john in America," he said with a soft Midwestern accent.

I looked over. He was about 50 and slightly overweight, and wore a buttoned-up polo shirt, blue jeans and sneakers, and a logoed, two-color baseball cap.

"Yeah," I smiled and nodded.

I would like to think that my original construct for worth and self-worth, when applied to institutions, might not be too far off the mark after all. That a simple, functional White House is more valuable than the Marble Palace with its historic Peacock Throne; that America's Top John is worth more than Royal Stables; that a system accepting of its leaders' and citizens' frailties, a system in fact designed to accommodate such frailties, is worth more than a kingdom whose king never needs to use the toilet.

A simple, functional White House is more valuable than the Marble Palace with its historic Peacock Throne; a system accepting of its leaders' and citizens' frailties is worth more than a kingdom whose king never needs to use the toilet.

I came to study in the United States in 1978, a few months before the Shah and his family escaped from Iran for the last time. They took with them the remains of Reza Shah, dug up from his mausoleum. Some weeks later, after the success of the Revolution, I sat in front of the small portable television in my San Diego apartment and watched bulldozers destroy the structure under which Reza Shah's body had lain for decades, to be replaced, as a last insult to the final Persian dynasty, with public toilets. ■

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Back to the Future

The nostalgic yet progressive appeal of wizards, hobbits, and Jedi knights

Michael Valdez Moses

When the current generation of American children looks back on the first decade of the 21st century, it is possible that the three names it will most readily recall will be not Saddam Hussein, Osama bin Laden, and George W. Bush but Harry Potter, Frodo Baggins, and Luke (or Anakin) Skywalker. Never before have three ongoing series of films—the *Star Wars*, *Lord of the Rings*, and *Harry Potter* franchises—proved so fabulously profitable and internationally popular.

The original *Star Wars* (1977) grossed $513 million worldwide, and its 1997 re-release earned $460 million. International theatrical rentals of the film swelled the total by an additional $779 million. (Not bad for a film that cost $11 million to produce.) *The Fellowship of the Rings* (2001) has proved fabulously popular, with worldwide grosses totaling $860 million and worldwide rentals $500 million. The *Harry Potter* series has produced only slightly less magical returns, with $600 million in worldwide rentals alone for *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. Nor will the flood of such films subside anytime soon. The VHS and DVD editions of *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* have recently been released. The theatrical premiere of *The Return of the King* (the third part of *The Lord of the Rings*) is slated for December 2003. *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* and *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* are due out in 2004 and 2005. The next *Star Wars* film will be released in 2005, and a third trilogy of *Star Wars* movies is now in the planning stages.

While each of these series is impressively original, collectively they exhibit enough common features to prompt the question of why a certain film genre, loosely categorized as science fiction/fantasy (purists would scoff at this conflation), has unexpectedly assumed pre-eminence in contemporary culture. The question is no less relevant for viewers, such as myself, who have been disappointed by some of the recent episodes in these series—*The Phantom Menace*, *Attack of the Clones*, and *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*.

The popularity of these films owes much to the immense talent that has made possible their cinematic realization (and, with *The Lord of the Rings* if not *Harry Potter*, to the literary genius that gave birth to the novels on which the films are based). Technological advances in special effects and computer-generated imaging have lent a narrative credibility and spectacular quality to these movies that hitherto was unachievable. (By contrast, recall Ralph Bakshi's feeble 1977 animated rendering of *The Lord of the Rings*). The fact that all three series appeal to a broad audience that includes children and adolescents, as opposed to more "serious" films that market themselves exclusively to "mature" viewers, no doubt helps explain their box office success. But we are left to wonder why these particular films, as opposed to so many other well-crafted, financially successful, and technologically advanced pictures aimed at a general audience—*Ice Age*, *Stuart Little*, *Toy Story*, *Shrek*—have proved so culturally resonant.

One significant feature common to all three series is a dramatically compelling (as opposed to a didactically plodding) struggle between good and evil. The protagonists of these films do battle with a potent, even superhuman incarnation of evil: Sauron in *The Lord of the Rings*, Voldemort in *Harry Potter*, Darth Vader in *Star Wars*. Neatly counterpoised to these demonic figures are characters possessing magical or mystical powers who lead the fight for goodness and justice: Gandalf, Dumbledore, Obi-Wan Kenobi (and Yoda). Between these moral poles stand a set of emblematic heroes—Frodo Baggins, Harry Potter, Luke Skywalker—who, though they struggle against evil, nevertheless discover

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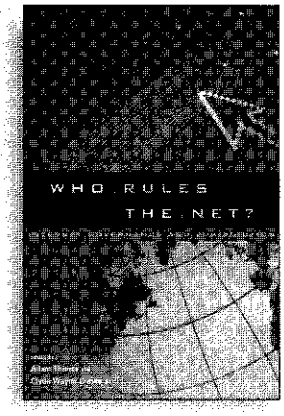

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that they are related to or tempted by the evil figure they ostensibly oppose. Their struggle against evil ultimately turns out to be internal as much as it is external. As the literary critic Tom Shippey has pointed out, J.R.R. Tolkien's *Rings* trilogy makes a strong theological appeal. Like *Harry Potter* and *Star Wars*, it offers a mythological explanation of the apparent chaos, pain, disappointment, horror, and violence of the world in terms of a Manichean struggle of cosmic forces.

But if each of these series reiterates a theological narrative rooted in Western European Christian societies, they nonetheless respond to a specifically modern set of social anxieties. Indeed, each expresses a deep discomfort with modernity itself. If the fundamental narrative structure of the films borrows heavily from tradition, the specific forms that both good and evil assume within them are those of the modern world.

This may seem counterintuitive, given that science fiction and fantasy famously provide an escape from the realities of contemporary life. Yet all three series remain thematically rooted in the social problems from which they provide a cinematic holiday. Each represents an imaginary world that is and yet is not our own. Each presents a critical view of our modern world, and each offers a glimpse of a different and preferable modernity. These alternative worlds integrate appealing elements of the premodern past into a vision of the future.

One of the contemporary discontents to which all three series respond is a general boredom with modern bourgeois existence. The escapism of these stories is an antidote to the routine that is the special curse of safe, static middle-class life. The suffocating and vulgarly materialistic world of the Dursleys, the family that initially raises the orphaned Harry Potter; the pettiness and relative inconsequence of life in the Shire, where Frodo Baggins was born; the laborious and task-centered existence of the young Luke Skywalker on his aunt and uncle's dusty provincial farm—all bespeak the ordinary world of the middle class. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* provides an especially unfavorable view of modern bourgeois life. The Dursley home is what Harry most eagerly wishes to escape: His life is literally cramped, his daily existence reduced to the meager dimensions of a closet-cum-bedroom under the stairs.

It is no accident that all three series initially focus on the fortunes of an adventurous youth. Harry, Luke, and Frodo all secretly hope *not* to become like their elders. Though by no means revolutionary firebrands, all rebel against the older generation. All share a common desire for freedom, travel, and heroic adventure, a yearning to leave behind the safe but restrictive world in which they were raised.

The fact that such narratives strike a responsive chord among parents as well as their children suggests that the lure of adolescent rebellion against bourgeois life may be as strong—or stronger—for middle-aged, middle-class adults whose hopes of realizing their youthful romantic aspirations are rapidly fading. If *The Lord of the Rings*, *Star Wars*, and *Harry Potter* reject the modern bourgeois order, each also implicitly rejects the notion that each generation should emulate and carry on the traditions of their elders. As such, all three exem-

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plify the spirit of romantic rebellion against the modern bourgeois order—a rebellion that is itself fundamentally modern and bourgeois. Each generation thinks of itself as progressive and its parents as conservative or reactionary. Yet the traditions of the older generation are in no way deeply rooted in the past, emerging instead from a relatively recent rejection of the norms of a not-so-distant generation.

This cycle of generational revolt is complicated by the curious fact that the heroes of these romances ultimately stumble on a secret inheritance at odds with their staid middle-class lives. Each learns that his true parents are nothing like the people who actually raised him. Luke makes the fateful discovery that his father was a Jedi knight. Harry finds his real parents were wizards. Frodo takes after his errant, widely traveled, and eccentric uncle Bilbo, who bequeaths to him the very ancient Ring of Power. All these romantic heroes rebel against their given social role and paternal expectations in the name of a hitherto concealed "true" identity rooted in an obscure and mysterious past. To become a wizard, a Jedi, or the Ring bearer is to claim an ancient title and anachronistic position impossible to reconcile with the narrow social possibilities and historical limitations of life in Little Whinging, the Shire, or a rural community on the outskirts of a galactic empire.

Were the heroes of these films to leave their tedious lives for a world utterly alien from the mundane ones they had known, these stories would offer pure escapism. Instead, each encounters a hellish version of the modern world he has fled. In the first *Star Wars* trilogy, Luke battles an empire propped up by a vast, robot-like army of imperial storm troopers and equipped with the most deadly weapon of mass destruction, the Death Star. Joining a loose confederation of rebels, he helps spearhead a war of independence against a regime that is soulless, tyrannical, hegemonic, and technologically based. Given that George Lucas' original trilogy was produced during the final years of the Cold War, it is not hard to identify his Empire with what Ronald Reagan famously described as "the Evil Empire." (That critics of Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative derisively dubbed that program "Star Wars" further melded the series with historical reality.) Despite costumes freely adapted from the *Flash Gordon* serials and titles borrowed from Roman antiquity, the Empire represents a fusion of fascist and communist elements.

Luke and the other freedom fighters who oppose this totalitarian menace are characterized by their relative independence (suggested by Han Solo's very name), their voluntary and negotiable participation in the great struggle, and their comparatively decentralized forms of resistance and military organization. Perhaps the most interesting thematic development of the second trilogy (now two-thirds complete) is the revelation that the Empire emerged historically out of an apparently free and republican federation of planets. While reiterating in simplified form the transformation of republican into imperial Rome, the overall arc of the Lucas films hints that the totalitarian Empire issued from the ostensibly democratic and free Federation. And whereas the first trilogy celebrated the exploits of independent smugglers (Han and Chewbacca) who join up to fight an oppressive Empire that controls galactic trade, the second trilogy begins with the revelation that an evil Trade Federation, sanctioned by the Republic, secretly plots to take over the independent planet of Naboo. Surely the doubts about the collusive relationship between big

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business and big government, and the growing concern with the attendant loss of freedom in the Republic, reflect the changed post–Cold War environment of the 1990s: The only hegemon remaining is not the Evil Empire of the Soviets (much less the ever more transparent ghost of Nazi Germany) but the last great superpower: America.

Lucas claims to have laid out the overall arc of his story long before the fall of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc. Even so, there is an unexpectedly subversive strain in the *Star Wars* saga that has become more pronounced as the long narrative has unfolded. The whole series turns, after all, on the fact that the great hero of the Federation, the Jedi Anakin Skywalker, goes over to the "dark side." In the process, he literally loses his individual human features and becomes something halfway between man and machine, trapped within the inhuman armor and featureless technological mask of Darth Vader. That the defenders of individual freedom and democratic liberty might paradoxically come to resemble the totalitarian enemy they once opposed is darkly suggested by the final scene of the first *Star Wars* film. Lucas' concluding shot of Han, Luke, and Chewbacca triumphantly advancing toward the dais on which stands Princess Leia recalls a famous scene from the Nazi propaganda film *Triumph of the Will*: Leni Riefenstahl's high-angled shot of Hitler and two top aides (including Goebbels) walking in measured fashion between the vast crowds at the 1934 Nuremberg rallies. The grim suggestion of the *Star Wars* films, borne out by the more spectacular but dramatically less compelling second series, is that the regime that once represented freedom and democracy has itself become corrupt, centralized, soulless, intrusive, despotic, and imperial.

Frodo's quest in *The Lord of the Rings* brings him face to face with a similarly terrifying image of modern political life. As Shippey has noted, notwithstanding Tolkien's denial that his trilogy was an allegory of the political events of 1939–45, both Isengard and Mordor, the realms of the Tolkien villains Saruman and Sauron, exhibit many features of 20th-century totalitarian states. (To be fair, they also exemplify characteristics of the German, Austro-Hungarian, and Turkish powers of World War I.) Once enemies, Saruman and Sauron have become allies, though their alliance is built on the mutual recognition that the weaker must ultimately serve the stronger. Their dark kingdoms lack all individual liberties. They rule vast worker-states devoted to conquest and marked by compulsory military service and forced labor. Their orc armies consist of deformed and inhuman masses lacking relations, beliefs, traditions, and interests outside the direct control of the state. In a scene vividly captured in one of Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* films, Saruman breeds a new species of orc, the Uruk-Hai. Such eugenically designed creatures literally owe their existence to the regime's dark powers.

The oppressive conditions of these militaristic states are underscored in Tolkien's final part of the trilogy, *The Return of the King*. Here Frodo learns that Sauron built the fearsome Tower of Cirith Ungol not for defensive purposes but in order to keep those under his power *within* the borders of Mordor. Any reader old enough to remember the great totalitarian regimes of the past century will

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recognize the allegorical dimension of Tolkien's work.

J.K. Rowling's vision of political and social evil is rather obscured in the first two *Harry Potter* films. But in the climactic scene of Rowling's first novel, in which Professor Quirrell reveals himself to be Harry's hidden enemy, the two-faced villain recites the creed of his master, Voldemort: "There is no good and evil, there is only power and those too weak to seek it." Voldemort's vulgar Nietzscheanism is a familiar moral nihilism that can never be entirely vanquished. As opposed to Harry, who represents the redeeming power of love, Quirrell has become, like Voldemort, "full of hatred, greed, and ambition." His amoral doctrine waits a new incarnation by means of which it can re-enter the world. Should Voldemort ever succeed, Hogwarts—Harry's school of wizardry and witchcraft—would become "a school for the Dark Arts." Rowling suggests that this evil has manifested itself fairly recently in the modern era: "Dumbledore is particularly famous for his defeat of the Dark wizard Grindelwald in 1945."

But if the ultimate institutionalization of the Dark Side is kept at bay in the *Harry Potter* films, lesser forms of badness trouble Harry's years at school. In particular, Harry, the quintessential scholarship boy, constantly struggles against the malign intentions of his upper-crust classmate Draco Malfoy. Given the historically contentious class politics of modern Britain, the threat that Malfoy exemplifies, class prejudice and snobbery, likely touches a raw nerve among Rowling's British readers in a way that their American counterparts do not fully appreciate. Nonetheless, the virulent and unjustified antipathy that Malfoy feels toward "riffraff" and "Mudbloods" (those of non-magical ancestry) clearly represents the defining ethos of the ancient Malfoy family, Professor Snape, and the residents of the most exclusive (and illustrious) house at Hogwarts: Slytherin. Not surprisingly, the evil forces of Voldemort are surreptitiously linked with the upper-crust students and teachers of Slytherin. Ron Weasley, Harry's close friend, reports that Draco Malfoy's distinguished father (a Slytherin alumnus) was among those great wizards who joined Voldemort during his first grab for power—and that he needed little persuading to ally himself with the forces of evil.

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One might say that the defining moment for Harry's future comes when he insistently asks *not* to be placed in Slytherin, despite his eligibility. In short, the great menace that haunts Hogwarts and indeed Britain itself is the old self-interested political, financial, and cultural elite that remains opposed to the new, more democratic heroism of Harry Potter.

If the *Harry Potter* series displays hostility toward conservatism and the traditional class hierarchies of England, its success nonetheless relies on recuperating many traditional features of English society for a more pluralistic, multi-ethnic, and egalitarian vision of the United Kingdom. The charm of these films relies not solely on the thrill of magic, but also on the appeal of the archaic and anachronistic. In a fundamental respect, the Potter stories are simply fanciful versions of a well-established and well-respected literary genre: the *Bildungsroman* or "novel of education" set at an elite public school or university (e.g., *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, *Brideshead Revisited*). Like the modern middle-class boy admitted on fellowship to an elite English educational institution, Harry must learn rituals, games, social protocols, and systems of knowledge that belong to the past.

To memorize ancient chants and spells is not so very different from learning the dead languages of Latin and Greek. To become a star "Seeker" at Quidditch is comparable to mastering schoolboy games such

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as Fives (played at Eton) or taking up a traditional pastime of the English social elite—cricket. The remote and bucolic location, immense wealth, privileged social standing, quaint academic dress, architectural grandeur, and ancient historical stature of Hogwarts all bespeak a rootedness in the English past. To enter Hogwarts is to travel back in time.

Indeed, before he passes through its ancient doors, Harry must buy his school supplies—a wand, an owl, books of magical lore—in Diagon Alley, a secret shopping district at the heart of present-day London that is a visual compendium of medieval, Renaissance, and Victorian England. The persistence of such places and institutions as Diagon Alley and Hogwarts in a contemporary Britain dominated by the spirit and customs of ordinary Muggles (as normal humans are called) is more truly magical than any spell cast at Hogwarts.

Of course, Harry's school does not represent a simple return to the moral values of the English past. Rowling carefully introduces crucial features of modern liberal Britain. The student body at Hogwarts is notably heterogeneous: Its houses hold a conspicuous mix of black, South Asian, Celtic, and Anglo-Saxon students. Girls are fully the equals of boys, as students, faculty, and Quidditch players. Most important, those who attend the prestigious school are drawn from rich and poor, privileged and obscure, urban and rural backgrounds. All accents are spoken at Hogwarts. If class conflict still lurks behind the institution's attractive face, the school also exemplifies the progressive spirit of the new multi-ethnic, feminist, democratic, postimperial, and communitarian U.K. The education of Harry Potter represents a magical attempt to wed the best of traditional English culture with Britain's most progressive social values.

Because *Star Wars* reflects an American rather than British worldview, it draws on a briefer national history. Luke Skywalker's status as a provincial farmboy making his way in the galaxy evokes a distinctively American nostalgia for the small towns and rural communities of the recent past. By visually evoking the American western—the dusty barren landscape of the planet Tatooine on which Luke's aunt and uncle make their home, the image of the burned-out homestead and the bodies of massacred settlers—Lucas manages to establish his hero as a representative of the American frontier. More generally, the aw-shucks demeanor of Luke and Han, their love of futuristic hot rods, their do-it-yourself Yankee ingenuity, and their go-it-alone determination are meant to summon up the virtues of a simpler, pre-urbanized, pre-corporate, decentralized, and more virtuous American era. Victory over the Empire depends crucially on the virtues and skills of Yankee farmers, frontiersmen, and commercial traders. (Han is the exemplary unregulated, freewheeling, independent trader cum smuggler).

Meanwhile, as in the *Harry Potter* series, the virtues of the American past are slyly blended with a forward-looking and progressive sense of the new American century. The conflict between frontiersman and aboriginal, between white and black, between the "native" American citizen and the ethnic immigrant are largely effaced. (A few residual traces persist—the Jawas of Tatooine, for example, are troublesome nomadic desert scavengers, though not a serious threat to civilized existence.) In Lucas' future there exists amity and equal-

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ity between white man and Wookie (Chewy is more of a full partner than Tonto to Han's Lone Ranger), between whites (Han, Luke, Obi-Wan) and blacks (Lando Calrissian and Mace Windu), between men and women (Princess Leia, Queen Padmé Amidala).

The irregular rebel army is the racially and sexually integrated volunteer force of the post-Vietnam era. Even the deeply fraught relations of master and slave are reinvented as the amicable relationship between a young man and his favorite androids. The most heterogeneous clientele gathered from the farthest reaches of the galaxy drink together in the same wayside cantina, and a rich interplanetary mix of ethnicities, races, and genders are conspicuously represented in the Republican Senate. Lest this multi-ethnic, gender-neutral future seem to lack ancient traditions or theological grounding, the Jedi are there to represent a deep wisdom—part Eastern mysticism, part Rosicrucianism, part traditional Protestantism, and wholly New Age. The American past, it seems, is to be the progenitor of the New American Millennium.

Of the three series, *The Lord of the Rings* represents the most conservative and critical assessment of modernity. Where both *Harry Potter* and *Star Wars* project a youthful optimism about the future, *The Lord of the Rings* exhibits a more deeply nostalgic and elegiac attitude toward the past.

To be sure, the forces of Saruman and Sauron are ultimately defeated by the unified efforts of "the four, the free peoples"—elves, dwarves, Ents (giant, peripatetic, talking trees), and men, to which we must add the fifth free people, the hobbits of the Shire. Aragorn is triumphantly crowned King Elessar and united in marriage to the elfin Lady Arwen. Yet any reader of Tolkien's novels or viewer of Jackson's films recognizes the tragic dimension of these works.

Bilbo is tormented until his dying day by the memory of the Ring. Frodo never fully recovers from the wound he suffers from the blade of the Ringwraiths, nor the one Gollum inflicts on him at Mount Doom. Boromir dies repenting his betrayal of the Ring bearer. The Shire does not escape the dreadful consequences of the War of the Ring: Before Frodo and Sam return home, Saruman brutally exploits and tyrannizes the Shire. And the longed-for destruction of the Ring of Power marks the end of Elvish civilization in Middle Earth (as Tolkien's world is called). Of the Elvish peoples only Arwen, who chooses a mortal life, will remain. The others, along with Frodo, are borne by ship "into the West."

Where *Harry Potter* and *Star Wars* project a youthful optimism about the future, *The Lord of the Rings* exhibits a deeply nostalgic and elegiac attitude toward the past.

The tragic and elegiac dimensions of *The Lord of the Rings* only heighten the appeal of traditional and premodern ways of life. Making spectacular use of the varied natural scenery of his native New Zealand, Jackson has succeeded in conveying a vision of preindustrial existence that is immensely appealing. The unsullied beauty of the country's mountains and lakes provides an inspiring backdrop for the simple village life of the Shire. The realms of the elves are fully integrated into their wondrous natural settings, while their architecture, furnishings, and clothing are based on organic forms; it is impossible at times to distinguish those things crafted by the elves from the natural shapes that flourish in their old forests and mountainous river valleys. Having spent much of his youth in and around the urban blight of Birmingham, one of England's first great industrial cities, Tolkien anticipated in his fiction many contemporary ecological concerns. Treebeard—leader of the Ents—speaks for Tolkien when he says Gandalf is "the only wizard that really cares about trees." With few exceptions, the free peoples of Middle Earth are distinguished by their willingness to integrate themselves into the natural world and not to disrupt or destroy it.

By contrast, Saruman "has a mind of metal and wheels" and "does not care for growing things." Jackson's films emphasize the hellish atmosphere of Isengard, where Saruman's orcs clear-cut the forest and ravish the landscape in order to build what amounts to an enormous munitions factory. Fittingly, the Ents destroy Isengard by unleashing the river dammed up by Saruman's forces.

Of course, the free peoples of Middle Earth are not entirely immune to the lure of technology, industrialism, and the modern project. The dwarves have proved too relentless and rapacious in their pursuit of *mithril*, the precious silver they mine from under the Mountains of Moria. In the course of their ambitious building and tunneling they have awakened the Balrog, an evil creature who engages Gandalf in mortal combat. The wizard draws a moral from the misfortune of the

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dwarves: "Even as *mithril* was the foundation of their wealth, so also it was their destruction: they delved greedily and too deep, and disturbed that from which they fled, Durin's Bane."

Although the Shire does not provide much of an arena for high adventure or personal ambition, and although its village customs can seem stifling, its deep attraction becomes apparent to Frodo after he leaves its confines. Until the onset of the War of the Ring, the Shire largely escaped the great political struggles. Its relative obscurity and isolation—most in Middle Earth have never heard of hobbits—is a measure of its political independence. The hobbits know only a very loose and undemanding form of local self-government. In this respect, Tolkien's much-vaunted medievalism (he was a prominent scholar of Anglo-Saxon and Middle English literatures at Oxford) seems consonant with certain 19th-century theories of the origins of English liberty.

For Tolkien, as for other Victorian defenders of the medieval English past, the premodern period of loose and competing feudal political relations and independent townships gave birth to modern English political and personal freedoms. An epoch of weak monarchs, locally based political authorities, and intersecting and sometimes conflicting ties to church, local landholder, township, guild, and king was more conducive to personal liberty than was a later, apparently more uniform and "progressive" era of strong centralized government, universal suffrage, and mass politics. In any case, when Frodo and his companions return to the Shire after the destruction of Sauron, they find that the traditional "medieval" world of village life has changed for the worse.

In the adventurers' absence, the Shire has fallen under the dominion of Saruman. Prosperity has been replaced by shortages and rationing. Personal property is seized by the new government for the sake of "fair distribution," though most of these goods end up in the hands of corrupt officials. Old family homes have been destroyed to make way for shabbier public housing. The old mill has been replaced by several larger ones that are "always a-hammering and a-letting out a smoke and a stench." Beautiful old trees have been cut down and the river polluted. Political corruption is rampant, as is physical intimidation by newly established public officials. Most significantly, the personal liberties of the hobbits have been sharply curtailed under an intrusive and alien form of government. As old Farmer Cotton puts it, "everything except Rules got shorter and shorter."

One of Frodo's exasperated companions proclaims, "This is worse than Mordor!" In fact, as the critic Shippey has astutely noted, Tolkien's postwar Shire, much like Orwell's Oceania in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, most closely resembles postwar Britain under the Labour government of the mid- and late 1940s.

In Tolkien's fantasy, Frodo and his friends manage to restore the old village life of the Shire, though the expulsion of Saruman and his cronies requires a pitched battle in which several hobbits lose their lives. Afterward, the fate of the Shire mirrors that of the rest of Middle Earth. Frodo's only memorable political act as deputy mayor is to "reduce the Shirriffs to their proper functions and numbers."

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Restored to the throne of Gondor, Aragorn frees the slaves of Mordor and restores to the wild men of the Forests of Druadan (his former allies against Mordor) their lands and political independence. Given the late imperial context in which Tolkien completed his trilogy, Aragorn's magnanimity hints at the necessity of extending liberty not only to those abject souls formerly enslaved by totalitarian regimes but also to "primitive" and politically subject peoples (i.e., colonized nations) more generally. Most significantly, Aragorn issues an edict that makes the Shire "a free Land under the protection of the Northern Sceptre." The hobbits of the Shire are guaranteed the right to elect their own mayors, run their own farms and small businesses, carry on their trade, and govern their own communities as they deem fit.

But this restoration of the traditional way of life is haunted by a pervasive sense of historical finitude. The rebirth of the Shire takes place against a grand historical narrative that witnesses the decline and fall of the great civilization of the elves in Middle Earth and the gradual and inevitable loss of their magical influence on the lives of men, dwarves, and hobbits. Like postwar Britain, the Shire survives, but only in diminished form, the quaint and picturesque relic of a once-glorious Elvish past that shall come no more. The Shire serves chiefly as a holiday stop for old wizards and displaced elves who indulge in one final nostalgic visit before heading "to the West" and to oblivion.

Tolkien's epic narrative turns on a single, stark moral choice: Those who would defeat Mordor must themselves refuse the Ring of Power. The great temptation for the books' and films' heroes is to believe that they can command that Ring for good. Tolkien's fantasy is deeply conservative insofar as this moral choice implies a rejection of the modern project: To preserve the good life, men must relinquish their efforts to acquire power, particularly technological and economic power over nature, for their own ends. But if Tolkien's Luddite fantasy is consonant with anti-modern environmentalism, it also embodies a desire for political liberties and personal freedoms increasingly imperiled by the expanded authority of modern nation-states, which is itself supported by many environmentalists through instruments such as the Kyoto protocols.

Mr. Butterbur, an innkeeper in Tolkien's trilogy, speaks for many lovers of fantasy, hobbit and human alike, when he expresses a deeply felt if often frustrated desire: "We want to be let alone." And yet the desire to be left alone, at least for the great majority of readers and viewers of contemporary science fiction and fantasy, is often inextricably combined with a contrary desire to arrange the future for the better, to direct the lives and welfare of others, if only generations yet to be born. The deepest utopian appeal of *The Lord of the Rings*, *Star Wars*, and *Harry Potter* is not to an adolescent yearning for a world inhabited by wizards, hobbits, and Jedi knights, but to a modern consciousness torn by mutually contradictory desires. In divine fashion we would redesign the entire cosmos according to our individual whims *and* throw off the chains of all external authority. We wish at once to be free and to be a god to others. We would return to an idyllic past and progress forward to an unbounded future. The truly magical power of these films and stories is that they allow us, if only for the brief moment in which we are enthralled by their spell, to believe that as modern individuals we can be both at home in the world and at one with ourselves.

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Birth of a Medium

Video games, art, and moral panic

Jesse Walker

For Henry Jenkins, a professor of media studies at MIT, the video game *Grand Theft Auto III* is a bit like *Birth of a Nation*, the 1915 film that cineastes praise for helping create the basic grammar of the movies and simultaneously damn for celebrating the Ku Klux Klan.

"In terms of what it does for games as a medium, *Grand Theft Auto III* is an enormous step forward," says Jenkins. "It represents a totally different model of how games can tell stories and what you can do in a gamespace. It happens to be yoked with some sophomoric images of violence that a lot of us wish weren't there."

Mary Lou Dickerson, a Seattle Democrat in the Washington legislature, sees only the violence. A bill she sponsored will ban stores from selling or renting violent video games to anyone under 17.

The bill, which the legislature has approved and the governor is expected to sign, defines "violent" as "realistic or photographic-like depictions of aggressive conflict in which the player kills, injures, or other- »

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In *Saying Yes*, Jacob Sullum of *Reason* argues that illegal drug use should be viewed the same way as drinking, with an emphasis on temperance rather than abstinence. Sullum rejects the idea that there is something inherently wrong with using chemicals to alter one's mood or mind. He uses compelling stories about real people to illustrate the point that there is such a thing as responsible drug use.

The drug war is based on the demonization of drugs and the people who use them. The assumption that certain drugs cannot be used responsibly is one of the biggest obstacles to drug policy reform. By refuting this myth, *Saying Yes* takes a bold and important step toward ending the nation's costly and devastating war on drugs.

"Jacob Sullum has produced a thoughtful, sane, and logical analysis of our drug laws. Is that even LEGAL?"
—Dave Barry, syndicated columnist

"*Saying Yes* is a powerful refutation of the pharmacological prejudices underlying the war on drugs. Jacob Sullum highlights the injustice of punishing people for their politically incorrect choice of intoxicants."
—Nadine Strossen, president of the American Civil Liberties Union; professor of law, New York Law School

"I've never used a recreational drug (or even had a sip of alcohol) in my life, but Jacob Sullum makes a great case to stop the drug wars. He exposes the tricks of the drug warriors, who scam the crowd with huckster patter about magical substances that force people to do evil."
—Penn Jillette, the larger, louder half of Penn & Teller

Saying Yes

In bookstores May 12

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Tear Down These Walls

Making the case for free trade

Charles Oliver

Free Trade Today, by Jagdish Bhagwati, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 128 pages, $24.95

Free Trade Under Fire, by Douglas A. Irwin, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 257 pages, $27.95

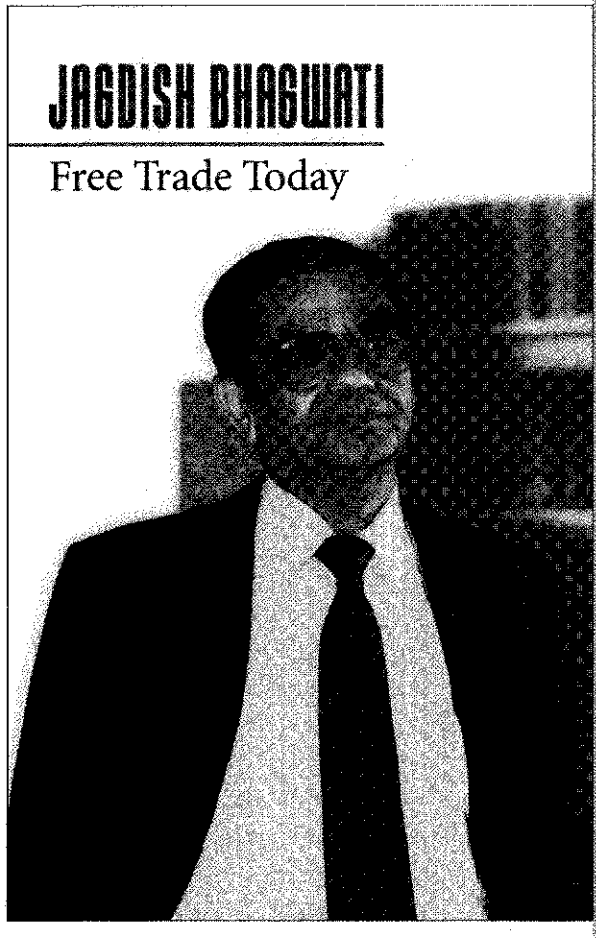
DOHA, QATAR, HAS gained more than a little renown as the headquarters of the U.S. Central Command during the invasion of Iraq. But how many people know that Doha is also the place the current round of global trade talks was launched back in 2001? The war has turned out to be much quicker and more successful than the latest efforts to reduce world trade barriers. After two years, the negotiators haven't produced even the framework of an agreement. And they still seem to be arguing over what exactly they'll negotiate about.

Blame it on an understandable fixation on the fight against terrorism. Blame it on a slow economy and the difficulty in convincing people who are already scared of losing their jobs that increased competition from abroad is a good idea. Blame it on a large and vocal anti-globalization movement. Blame it on any number of factors. But judging from its lack of action and words on behalf of free trade, it is clear that slashing trade barriers is not at the top of the Bush administration's agenda. Or that of any other industrialized country, it seems.

Fortunately, two of free trade's most able defenders have written new books arguing for renewed efforts at opening global markets. Columbia University economist Jagdish Bhagwati's *Free Trade Today* is the slighter of the two, both physically and intellectually. That's largely because the book is just a collection of three lectures delivered at the Stockholm School of Economics in 1998. But it still makes some telling points.

Bhagwati notes that the case for free trade was first made by Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations*. "It is the maxim of every prudent master of a family, never to make at home what it will cost more to make than to buy," Smith wrote. "The tailor does not make his own shoes but buys them from the shoemaker....What is prudence in the conduct of every family, can scarce be folly in that of a great kingdom. If a foreign country can supply us with a commodity cheaper than we ourselves can make it, better buy it of them with some part of the product of our own industry, employed in a way in which we have some advantage."

David Ricardo later solidified the case for free trade with his theory of comparative advantage. Ricardo argued that even if an individual,



wise causes physical harm to a human form in the game who is depicted, by dress or other recognizable symbols, as a public law enforcement officer."

Pushing the bill in her constituent newsletter, Dickerson cited five recent murders in California. "One of the six youthful murder suspects confessed their random killings were inspired by the popular game *Grand Theft Auto III*," she wrote. "'We play the game by day, we live the game by night,' he boasted to police."

Birth of a Nation faced censorship battles too. In those days, the courts held that the First Amendment didn't apply to the movies, which were seen as a medium more for pie fights than for art. In other words, they were viewed the way video games are viewed today. In 2002 U.S. District Judge Stephen Limbaugh ruled that video games are not protected speech, a judgment that's unlikely to be law 10 years from now but sums up the current conventional wisdom. (By limiting itself to restrictions on minors, Dickerson's bill avoids most of the First Amendment questions a full-fledged ban would raise.)

Forward-looking critics such as Jenkins, and an increasing number of game designers, believe that video games can be art—and that laws like this could retard the new medium's development. But most people regard them as toys at best and dangerous diversions at worst.

As John Springhall put it in *Youth, Popular Culture, and* »

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or nation, was better than all others at producing everything, trade would still make sense. To use Ricardo's famous example, let's say that Portugal produces both wine and cloth more cheaply than England. But let's also stipulate that it makes cloth at half the cost of England and wine at one-third the cost of England. In that case, both countries would benefit if Portugal concentrated on making wine and sold it to England for cloth. They'd each have more cloth and more wine at a lower total cost. Today, most mainstream economists accept the basic case for comparative advantage, but some argue that there are important exceptions, instances where trade does not raise overall welfare.

These two books make a powerful case for free trade—a case that apparently must be made again and again.

Bhagwati's first lecture, "Confronting Conventional Threats to Free Trade: The Postwar Revolution in the Theory of Commercial Policy," ably tackles the neoclassical economic literature that "qualifies" the free trade case. He agrees with critics such as Princeton's Paul Krugman that if there are significant market distortions, free trade may make conditions worse. For instance, if wages are "sticky" downward and can't fall to market-clearing levels, competition from low-wage countries could theoretically cause an increase in unemployment so large that the loss in income outweighs the welfare benefits from trade. But Bhagwati argues that such examples of market failure are much rarer than critics contend. And even where they do occur, the best response is to correct the distortion and proceed with free trade, not to impose new barriers. Bhagwati further argues that even if there is a case where trade protection may be the best course, we may still be wise in following a general principle of free trade.

Drawing on the "public choice" literature of *government* failure, Bhagwati contends that in the real world protectionist measures almost never follow the "benign" models suggested by neoclassical critics of free trade. Instead, special interests capture the trade programs and use them for their own ends, ends that rarely serve the general welfare. "The invisible hand may be frail, but the visible hand is crippled," he writes.

Bhagwati's second lecture advocates delinking the social agendas of labor standards, human rights, and environmental protection from trade policy. "By trying to kill these two birds (i.e. social agendas and freer trade) with one stone (i.e. trade treaties and institutions), you are most likely to miss both," he writes. He sees sanctions against products made with child labor as misguided. Such sanctions often force children into even more dangerous and degrading jobs, such as prostitution. "To make a dent on the problem," he writes, "we need to do 'heavy lifting': for example, work with local [non-governmental organizations], ensure that children go to school when taken off work, and guarantee that the poor parents' incomes do not shrink below the survival line when the children's income disappears."

Bhagwati doesn't think the agendas advanced by human rights activists, environmentalists, and other critics of globalization are necessarily invalid. On the contrary, he calls for beefing up the International Labor Organization (ILO) to enforce labor standards. And he calls for more funding for international aid agencies such as the United Nations Environment Program, UNICEF, and UNESCO. He simply believes these issues should rarely be addressed in trade talks.

There's no doubt that the international agencies he stumps for have done some good work, but are big bureaucracies the best way to help the Third World? A more decentralized approach might do a better job. Microlending by commercial and noncommercial banks has helped many farmers and small business owners in the Third World raise their output and standards of living. Some of that has been aided by big international agencies, but much of it has been conducted without significant help from those organizations. It would have been nice if Bhagwati had at least considered this alternative.

Bhagwati's third lecture is perhaps the most interesting. In it he argues forcefully against bilateralism and regionalism in trade negotiations. These sorts of agreements, he says, create regulatory complexity and confusion in trade policy, especially in the administration of overlapping, contradictory, and mind-bogglingly complicated "rules of origin" requirements. Bhagwati calls this the "spaghetti-bowl effect": Firms and governments become tied up in knots of messy, discriminatory red tape, which makes little sense in a world of integrated cross-border production.

Take the North American Free Trade Agreement's complex rules of origin, which detail how much

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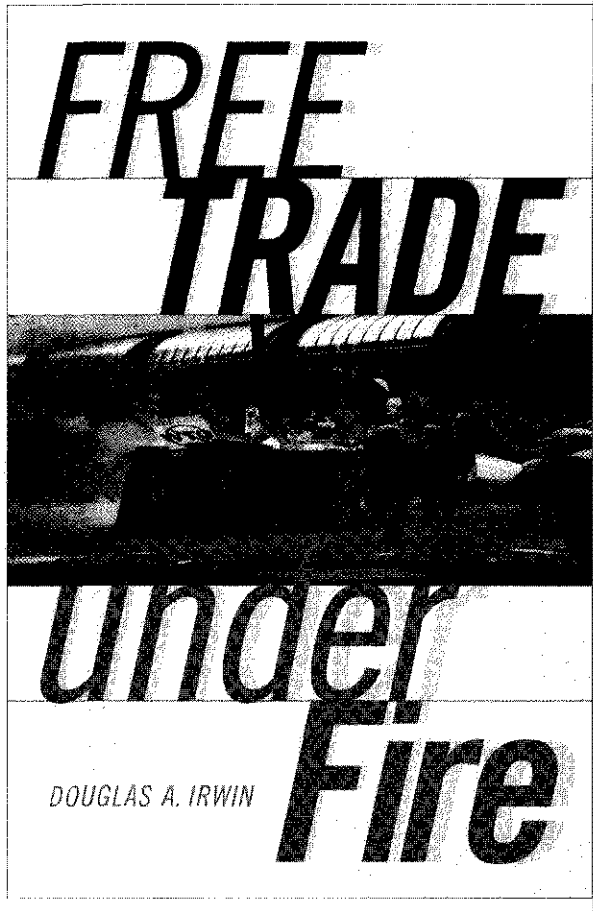
"North American" content automobiles must have to cross borders tariff free. These are designed to keep companies from simply importing goods from outside the free trade zone and selling them within it. Bhagwati also argues that such bilateral trade agreements entice the members of a free trade zone to discriminate against nonmembers.

Bhagwati thinks the best way to pursue free trade is through multilateral trade negotiations, such as happened under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and is supposed to happen under the auspices of the World Trade Organization. But he also argues that unilateral reductions in trade barriers usually make eminent economic sense, pointing to the examples of countries that have benefited by unilaterally dropping their trade barriers, such as the United Kingdom in the 19th century and, more recently, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Chile. "We need to remember," he writes, "that if we refuse to reduce our trade barriers just because others do not reduce theirs, we lose from our trading partners' barriers and then lose again from our own."

At the same time, Bhagwati argues against what he calls "aggressive unilateralism," or the efforts of large economies to bully smaller ones into opening up their markets. He includes in this category actions brought under Section 301 of the 1974 Trade Law, which allows the United States to respond to the "unfair" trading practices of other nations by raising barriers against their products. Surprisingly, Bhagwati gives little attention to these attempts to force open markets, other than to say "no one likes a bully." Aggressive unilateralism does create an atmosphere of distrust among nations. Instead of looking for ways to benefit their citizens by reducing trade barriers, nations start to look for bargaining chips to play in international negotiations. And attempts to punish "unfair" trade rarely have been about opening up markets. Rather, they've been efforts at domestic protection. Domestic firms are almost always on the lookout for ways to exclude foreign goods and services. If they can do so under the banner of freeing trade, so much the better for them.

Bhagwati has discussed all of these issues at length in other venues, including *The Dangerous Drift to Preferential Trade Agreements* and *The World Trading System at Risk*. In a lecture format, of course, his time was limited, but it still would have been better if he had gone into a little more depth on this issue. While multilateralism and unilateralism may indeed be preferable to bilateralism in trade policy, regional agreements may not be as destructive as Bhagwati argues. Indeed, they may be the only path to freer trade



Moral Panics (1998), "A new medium with mass appeal, and with a technology best understood by the young... almost invariably attracts a desire for adult or government control."

Video games date back to the early 1960s, but they didn't become popular until Pong and Space Invaders arrived in the '70s, bringing the dreaded video arcade with them. A dark maze filled with nickelodeon-sized consoles, the arcade became a magnet for anxieties and urban legends. For fretful parents, they were a hangout for hooligans cutting class to play Pac-Man, losing hours and quarters that could be spent in the fresh air and wholesome sunshine.

Worse, those spaceship-shooting toughs would become role models for younger arcade goers. Before you knew it, they'd be learning not just how to save a girl from Donkey Kong but how to smoke weed, play slots, and steal cars.

The fear of arcades dates back to long before video games existed, as anyone familiar with the pool hall scene in *The Music Man* already knows. Any public space that appeals to kids but is not under constant adult supervision is going to inspire anxieties. If games, traditionally associated with sin, are involved, then those anxieties will be magnified.

The current panic, though, focuses on games played not in public but in private, on the family PlayStation while Mom or Dad is upstairs. "We've »

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when multilateral talks have come to a standstill, as appears to be the case in the Doha negotiations.

While Bhagwati's book deals largely with economic theory, Dartmouth economist Douglas A. Irwin builds a much more practical and empirical case for free trade in *Free Trade Under Fire*. Trade, he notes, is a vital engine of economic growth, especially in the United States, where exports and imports together make up about 25 percent of gross domestic product. Indeed, the importance of trade is growing. Exports accounted for almost 40 percent of merchandise production in 1999, up from just 15 percent in 1970. Further, the distinction between imports and exports is getting increasingly blurred. At least 3 percent of U.S. imports, worth about $25 billion, are actually domestic products that have been exported and then returned to the United States after further work abroad. The domestic content of this trade is especially large with Mexico and Canada.

"For one particular car produced by an American manufacturer," Irwin writes, "30 percent of the car's value is due to assembly in Korea, 17.5 percent due to components from Japan, 7.5 percent due to design from Germany, 4 percent due to parts from Taiwan and Singapore, 2.5 percent due to advertising and marketing services from Britain, and 1.5 percent due to data processing in Ireland. In the end, 37 percent of the production value of this American car comes from the United States." All told, 70 percent of all imports are used directly as inputs in American production, not consumed directly by households. That's up from 61 percent in 1950.

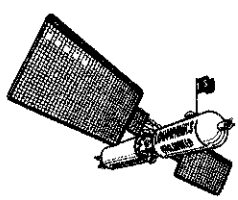
Protectionism would raise the costs of the raw materials and capital goods used by American industry. Irwin says new trade barriers, far from helping U.S. firms and American workers, would on balance harm employment in other domestic industries by raising their production costs. American workers would get hammered again by the higher costs for the goods and services they buy.

Some critics would argue that the link between imports and exports is not a necessary one. They might point to countries such as Japan and Singapore, which have allegedly grown their economies by focusing on exports while restricting imports. Irwin's case would have been strengthened if he had addressed this argument and the so-called Asian model of development closely.

Irwin does show how international trade improves productivity and raises standards of living. By increasing competition, it forces out the least productive producers and forces all remaining producers to adopt best practices. This allows the most successful firms to expand both domestically and internationally. Consider the introduction of Japanese automobile production methods and technology into the United States in the 1980s. Japanese firms brought their manufacturing methods to America directly, and American firms adopted the methods in new plants. Such improvements can be huge. Irwin points to the spectacular increases in agricultural output that have been attributed to the import of new crops and farming methods in countries across the world.

Many studies have demonstrated the productivity benefits from increased competition. In one nation after another, slashing trade barriers has led to a tripling or even quadrupling of productivity growth rates. In Canada, the North American Free Trade Agreement resulted in a 17 percent increase in productivity in industries previously protected by high tariffs and a 5 percent average increase for all manufacturing. "These productivity effects were not achieved through scale effects or capital investment, but rather due to a mix of plant turnover and rising technical efficiency within plants," Irwin notes. "By raising productivity, the [trade agreement] also helped increase the annual earnings of production workers, particularly in the industries previously most protected."

Not all of the benefits of international trade can be so easily quantified, but they are real nonetheless. Irwin points to the fall of the Soviet empire and the opening of the Soviet bloc to foreign trade. Almost over-



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night new foods, such as bananas and oranges, flooded into local markets, and the quality of previously available foods, such as potatoes, beef, and cabbage, improved. Irwin also cites the expansion of McDonald's into Asia. Asian restaurants had previously been noted for their dirty bathrooms, but McDonald's insisted on clean bathrooms in its outlets at all times. Soon, customers began to demand clean restrooms in other restaurants, and the owners had to comply or lose business. "The effect of such changes on aggregate output and income was minuscule," Irwin writes, "but the welfare gains from the availability of new and improved goods was not insignificant."

In Mexico, Chile, Taiwan, South Korea, and several other countries, political liberalization has followed economic liberalization and the removal of trade barriers. "Trade and economic development facilitate the growth of the middle class," Irwin argues. "It is within the middle class, if anywhere, that a broad ethic of civic responsibility and political engagement will develop to provide the foundation for both functional democratic governance and market economics."

If trade benefits nations, trade barriers cost them greatly. In the United States, sugar quotas alone cost consumers $900 million annually. The high price of sugar has cost the United States around 9,000 jobs in food manufacturing and refining, as many heavy users of sugar have closed down or moved their facilities to other nations.

Meanwhile, restraints on steel cost about $4 billion and restrictions on maritime shipping cost another $1.3 billion. Irwin cites one 1996 estimate that, all told, U.S. trade barriers cost Americans $32 billion annually.

Irwin is more critical than Bhagwati of the "social agendas" of free trade's critics. Bhagwati, for the most part, merely questions whether those agendas should be linked to trade policy. But Irwin shows that efforts to "strengthen" labor or environmental protections are often simply trade barriers in more pleasing garb. Bhagwati calls for strengthening the ILO and international aid agencies. Irwin isn't necessarily opposed to that, but he says those efforts will have only marginal effects on the living standards of workers. "Economic development is the only known way to increase wages," he writes. "The alternatives—massive foreign aid, stronger demands for social justice—are unrealistic or ineffective."

Indeed, if Irwin is right, strengthening global regulatory bodies may play right into the hands of those who would shut down international trade. "The more radical [anti-trade] groups have gained respectability by positioning themselves with mainstream organizations, such as moderate NGOs, UN agencies, labor unions and some political leaders and other public figures," he notes. This development raises the possibility that these NGOs and UN agencies have been captured or might be captured by special interest groups and ideologues committed more to curtailing trade than to improving the human condition.

That possibility points to a central weakness in both books. Bhagwati and Irwin assume their readers value growing economies and rising standards of living. For those who see commercialism and affluence as sins, the fact that free trade increases material welfare makes it all the more suspect. No economic argument will reach such critics. But these two books make a powerful case for free trade—a case that apparently must be made again and again.

Contributing Editor Charles Oliver (oliverc2@yahoo.com) writes for Shoutin' Across the Pacific (expats.blogspot.com).

gone through a cycle of moral panic that said, 'Kids are playing it, we don't know what it is,'" comments Jenkins.

"Now we're at the second danger point," he continues, "when the medium begins to spread outward and attract more adults while the public still perceives it as mostly a children's medium. *Grand Theft Auto III* was made, marketed, and rated for adults, but parents don't know the game *can* be for adults." So they buy the games for their kids without realizing what they're getting.

When the parents finally peek at the mayhem in the family den, the misunderstanding explodes. The result is wild rhetoric and ill-conceived laws that interfere not just with gamers' fun but with an art form in its infancy.

Associate Editor Jesse Walker (jwalker@reason.com) is the author of Rebels on the Air: An Alternative History of Radio in America (NYU Press).

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Machine Melee

Robot combat as the 21st-century dream sport

Brian Doherty

In late April I watched Los Angeles machine artist Christian Ristow and his crew lead a squad of remote-controlled killing machines through a fiery ritual of destruction. The robots ruined signs, giant heads, mannequins, and small houses with giant clamping mouths, bursts of flame, crushing pincers, and grinding treads. The audience of hundreds—drawn away from the reunion of punk rock pioneers The Stooges going on across the polo field at the Coachella music festival—was transfixed.

It's not as if the crowd of kids was amazed because they'd never seen anything like it before. During the last few years, destructive machines slugging it out to the death have became an unexpected pop cultural phenomenon. Fighting machines are now as cool as alternative music; they're not just for geeks anymore.

The new book *Gearheads: The Turbulent Rise of Robotic Sports* (Simon & Schuster), by *Newsweek* Silicon Valley correspondent Brad Stone, tells the story of how this sport was born and how it has evolved. Surprisingly, the book's story is ultimately more legal than mechanical. It's more about intellectual property and courtroom wrangles than engineering hot motors and cold steel.

The sport's roots lie in guerrilla street theater by the likes of Survival Research Laboratories' Mark Pauline and in geek games showcased at science fiction conventions. In 1994 Marc Thorpe, a former performance artist, dolphin trainer, and model builder for George Lucas, decided to institutionalize the loose, subcultural idea of fighting machines in competition. He created a series of annual "Robot Wars" shows, with financing from famously litigious music mogul Steve Plotnicki of Profile Records. The first Robot Wars took place on August 20, 1994, at San Francisco's Fort Mason, with a machine called The South Bay Mauler emerging as champion.

What started as a hip, underground Silicon Valley–Bay Area phenomenon quickly became a massive success, with a spin-off TV show (*Robot Wars*) becoming a sensation in Britain. Audiences loved to watch robots with colorful sobriquets such as Sir Killalot, Sgt. Bash, and Mangulator tear the transistors out of one another. Such success, however, also brought friction. Thorpe and Plotnicki's relationship descended into a swirling maelstrom of lawsuits that eventually destroyed Thorpe's marriage and his dream of becoming the undisputed (and wealthy) king of an exciting new sport.

Luckily for fighting machine enthusiasts, Plotnicki failed in his attempt to keep the very idea of robots fighting as sport and entertainment trapped on his corporate plantation. That's not to say he didn't try; he even succeeded in suing one alternative competition out of existence even before it started.

But in 1999 early *Robot Wars* competitor Trey Roski, scion of an immense real estate and sports team fortune, launched *Battlebots*, another variation on the fighting machine competition. *Battlebots* became an unexpected hit on American cable's Comedy Central. The more serious builders resented the jokey, wrestling-style commentary with which their competition was presented. They complained that the commentators often seemed to be making fun of the geekish enthusiasms of the operators.

Still, *Battlebots* gave them a big stage, royalty checks, and the promise of more to come from toy companies licensing their garage contraptions. As the profile of the formerly obscure gearhead game grew, so did corporate participation. Quickly, the grease monkeys—almost all men, incidentally—who assembled contraptions in their basements were competing against guys with gangs of employees spending all year and tens of thousands on killer robots. With growing popularity came the threat of death to the inspired amateurism they loved. Yet the amateurs could still win upset victories over the pros.

As a concept, robotic sports is simultaneously grounded in science fiction and as ancient as boys smacking rocks together to hear the cool sound and watch the piles of dust grow. Any kid who ever created fantasies of demolition with their toy cars feels a frisson of delight at the very idea of robot combat. (As Stone grants, since these warring devices are remote controlled and not truly autonomous, calling them *robots* is somewhat misleading.)

Like virtual reality and modern biotechnology, machine combat is another example of how modern wealth and technology enable the wildest human dreams—even those that seem disturbing to many—to come true. More squeamish engineering geeks such as Segway inventor Dean Kamen find the whole idea of fighting machines grotesque. He has even sponsored his own high-school-based robotics competition

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that is task-oriented, nonviolent, and noncompetitive. A noble effort perhaps, but except for those blinded by a belief that anything violent (even playful violence) is evil, who can doubt that *Battlebots* will do far more toward Kamen's stated goal of creating cultural glamor and enthusiasm around engineering than his "educational" efforts? Something there is about clanging metal on metal that moves the geek soul to innovation.

To some observers, the story Stone tells is already sputtering to a stop. *Battlebots*, after a couple of years of riding high in cable terms, was canceled last year, although the original *Robot Wars* show is still on in 45 countries and other similar shows are planned. The many books about how to build killer robots may eventually end up on the remainder table at your local bookstore. The sport may return to its roots as a passionate hobby for a few hundred obsessive mechanical geniuses. Those in it for the endorsement deals and toy merchandising may well drop out if the market goes soft. But those in love with the dream of making a cool machine, the likes of which has never before been seen, and pitting it in a marvelously violent but perfectly safe combat will still get to do their thing.

Stone describes the reaction of star robot builder Carlo Bertocchini, whose champion Biohazard was defeated on points in an epic *Battlebots* fight: "He was heading home to upgrade Biohazard, to prepare for the next tournament that fall. *Adapt or die*—that was the Darwinian imperative, and the battle cry of his favorite sport."

In a world that is ever richer in technological innovation and new forms of entertainment, "adapt or die" gets to the heart of more than just robotic sports. Even if we don't particularly thrill to the sight of a pneumatic hammer smashing out at a madly whirling souped-up wok sporting cutting blades, we are all better off for its being available to those who do. #

Associate Editor Brian Doherty (bdoherty@reason.com) is writing a book on the Burning Man festival for Little Brown.

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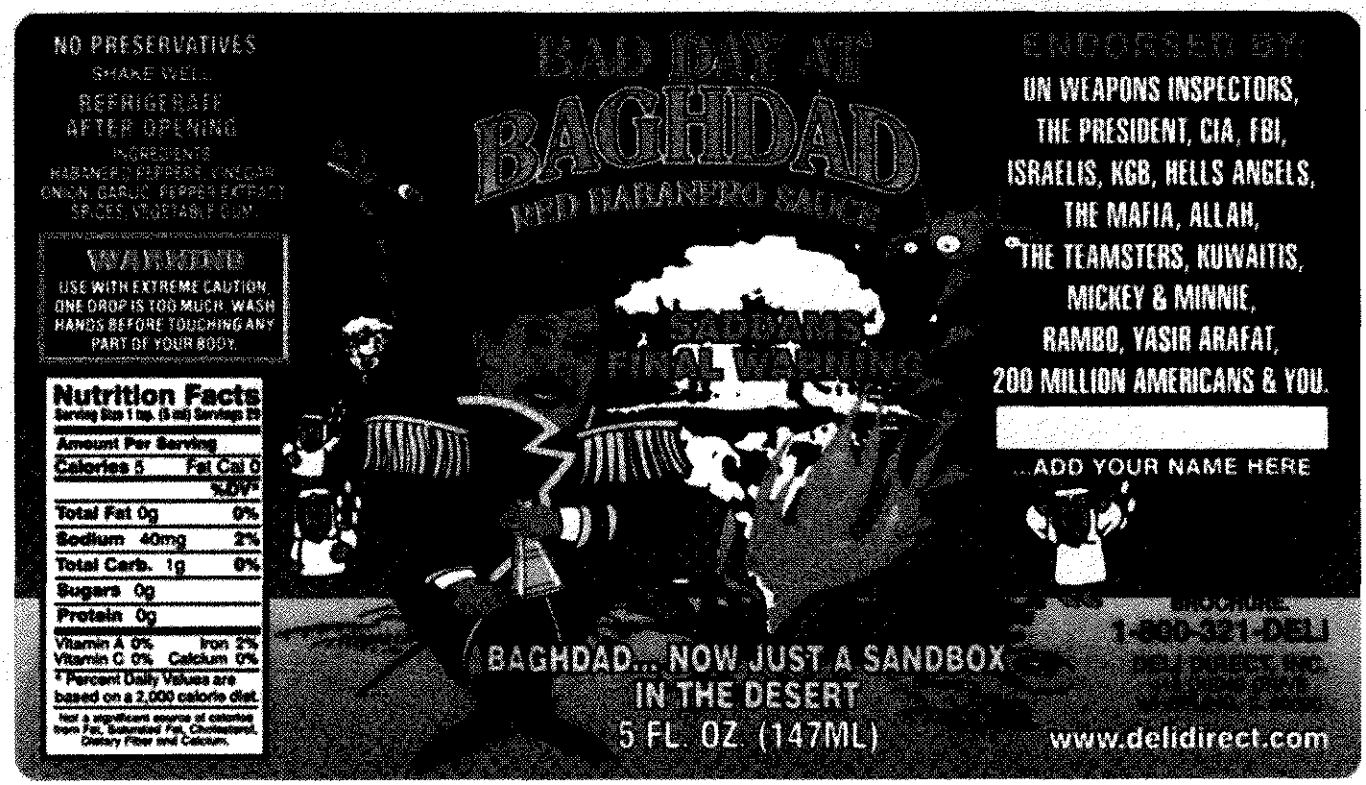
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Selling Saddam

Charles Paul Freund

HAVE YOU TRIED Bad Day at Baghdad yet? It's one of several competing hot sauces that associate Saddam Hussein with heartburn. (That's its label above.) "Try this one," promises Internet retailer Calido Chile Traders, "and kiss your camel goodbye!" A five-ounce bottle goes for $8.95.

You can dine on Saddam while sporting an Iraq War T-shirt; among the most popular are those featuring Mohammed Sayeed Al-Sahhaf, the information minister notorious for his flights of fantasy. "Baghdad Bob" is a war paraphernalia favorite: There's a mug, a talking doll, even a British-produced dance track sampling some of his most beloved denials.

After shuffling to Al-Sahhaf, you can settle in for a night of cards, dealing the "Iraqi Most Wanted Deck" ($5.95). The original deck was of course created by the Pentagon; commercial copies soon appeared on the market. "We can barely keep them in stock!" boast innumerable spams. "Buy them for poker night or to hand out to your friends and family!"

State propaganda usually enlarges the enemy as a perpetrator of atrocity and a bestial threat to civilization. The contemporary market, by contrast, has shrunk him. Enemy Ba'thists and Islamists are commodified as mere clowns. Soldiers have always lampooned the enemy, so it's notable that in an age of incipient terror, civilians too are happily buying the punch line that what really hangs in the balance is heartburn.

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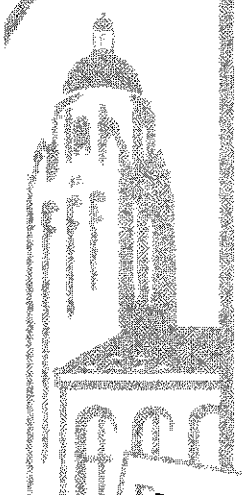
School Choice Works

Herbert J. Walberg is distinguished visiting fellow at the Hoover Institution; a member of Hoover's Koret Task Force on K–12 Education; and University Scholar and research professor emeritus of education and psychology at the University of Illinois at Chicago.



Paid for by the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.

Voucher advocates see parental choice as a means to an end—improving education through enhanced competition—but opponents fear such privatization would harm public schools. **Early research on American small-scale voucher programs suggests that choice may yield beneficial effects.** A massive, nationwide study of vouchers in Sweden proves the case.

The Swedish voucher experience is significant for several reasons. It extends over sufficient time for the supply of independent schools to expand and for public schools to respond. It has the potential to involve all the children in the nation and includes almost three hundred urban and rural municipalities. Unlike many American choice programs, few restrictions were placed on the entry of new independent schools. Unlike capitalistic America, moreover, Sweden is a socialist or mixed economy with a huge public sector, making the success of privatization unexpected.

Until 1992, Sweden's public schools were funded by the national government and operated by local municipalities. Then the national government adopted major reforms: Parents were allowed to choose their children's schools. Municipalities were required to fund approved independent schools at 85 percent of the per-student cost of public schools. A national agency was given the responsibility for approving new independent schools. To receive government funding, independent schools had to forgo tuition charges, meet established educational standards, and admit students without regard to ability, religion, or ethnicity.

Now "almost anyone can set up a school and receive public funding," according to Swedish economists Fredrik Bergström and Mikael Sandström, who conducted the voucher study. They add, "Sweden has become one of the most permissive countries in the Western world with regard to allowing parents to choose schools freely."

The reforms produced none of the negative consequences feared by choice opponents. Far from hurting the public schools, **competition from new independent schools has led to an improvement in the public schools**. As in other markets for goods and services, greater competition leads to greater improvement.

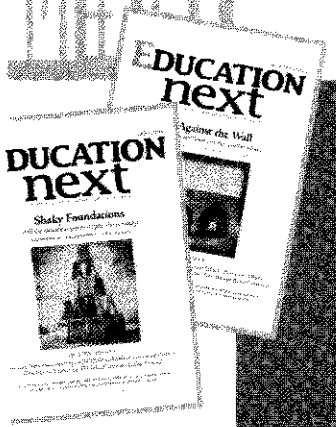
The number of independent schools increased fivefold, and their student enrollments increased fourfold. Although many of these schools were established in affluent areas, they also expanded rapidly in less-privileged areas serving working-class and immigrant populations. A majority of the new independent schools are specialized or pedagogy based, not religion based. Corporations run 30 percent of the independent schools, and some companies are expanding rapidly.

The researchers also found no indication that higher-income earners chose independent schools to a greater extent than low-income earners, no evidence that freedom of choice led to increased economic segregation, and nothing to indicate that independent schools have fewer special-needs students.

"The main lesson to be learned from the Swedish reforms is that school choice works," conclude Bergström and Sandström. It's also far from being "a radical libertarian experiment," they note, because the schools are still entirely financed by public funds.

School markets work in Sweden. Is there any reason why they shouldn't work in the United States?

— *Herbert J. Walberg*



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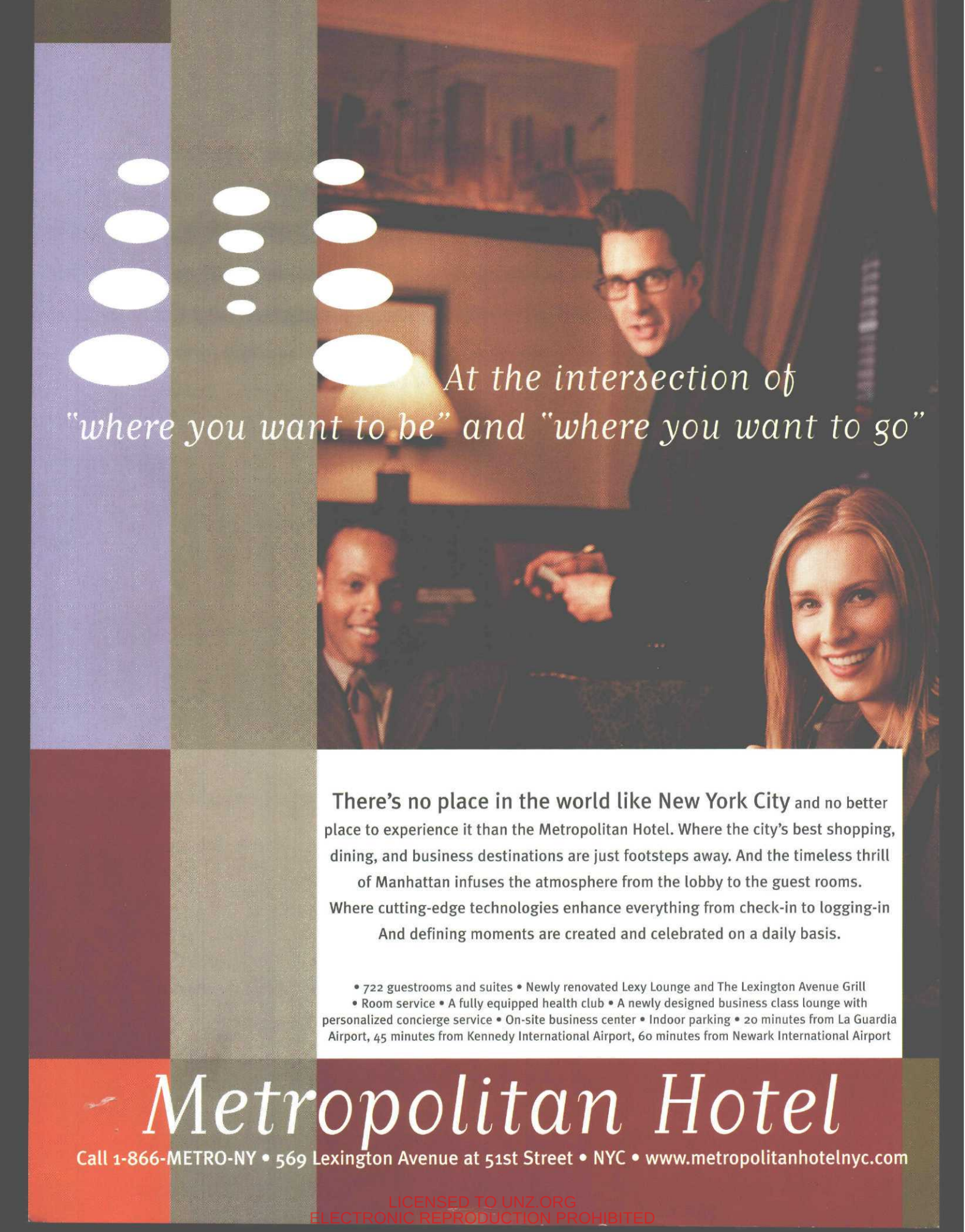

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